

A STUDY GUIDE ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION
FOR THE PASTORS AND CONGREGATIONS OF
THE HUDSON RIVER PRESBYTERY

A THESIS-PROJECT
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To Joanne:

The joy of the Lord is our strength!

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The Apostle Paul reveals himself to his friends in Corinth with an intimate look into his relationship with Jesus as he wrestles with his own human weaknesses. After he's complained about his "thorn in the flesh," he hears these words, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Paul's life and calling are empowered by God in spite of weaknesses that might otherwise interfere with Paul's calling as an Apostle. I thank God for helping me through the process of writing this thesis-project. Praise and glory belong to Jesus.

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ABSTRACT

The Book of Revelation is the Gospel in the form of apocalyptic literature. This thesis-project attempts to give pastors and congregants of the Hudson River Presbytery a way to approach Revelation with joy and passion using sound theological and exegetical practices. The study guide developed in this project for these pastors is a product of the research performed herein. Pastors and congregations of the Hudson River Presbytery who use the study guide can approach Revelation with confidence and joy as they explore the Gospel and its unique presentation in the last book of the Bible.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AND THE SETTING

Introduction

Many Christian people are afraid to read the Book of Revelation. A 21-year-old congregant came up to me and said she was “scared to death” to read Revelation because of all the “scary creatures, and hell, and stuff.” This young woman reads science fiction novels and watches horror movies. She is typical of her age group in that she is exposed to an overwhelming volume of TV and Hollywood violence. Yet, the last book of the Bible intimidates her. Is she the only one? Probably not. As will be discussed below, the methodology of this thesis-project not only addressed its main audience, the pastors of Hudson River Presbytery; it also attended to the congregations of these pastors.

Fee and Stuart identify what seems to be a common problem with Revelation. They write, “The book is in the canon; thus, for us it is God’s Word, inspired by the Holy Spirit. Yet when we come to it to hear this Word, most of us in the church today hardly know what to make of it.”¹

Fear and ignorance are a bad combination. The young congregant confesses she is afraid. Fee and Stuart point to ignorance among church members with their observation. Thus, fear and ignorance will rob a student of the joy of Scripture study.

Pastors of my denomination, the PC (USA), are wondering what to do with the last book of the New Testament canon. I know this because pastors of my Presbytery, the

¹ Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 249.

Hudson River Presbytery (HRP), may be seeking ways to teach their congregants about the Book of Revelation. My research of their attitudes and experience with Revelation reveal this to be true.

I think Revelation is accessible. I think there are tools we can use to open up our understanding of apocalyptic literature. This thesis-project is an expansion of a 2006 Bible study project on Revelation conducted at the First Presbyterian Church in Denton (DPC), New Hampton, New York.²

From June 2006, through August 2006, DPC studied the Book of Revelation. The Sunday morning congregation of 85 and a Bible study class of 10-12 people committed themselves to discovering a learning approach that would honor the last book of the Bible and its unique literary style. The methodology we discovered respects intellectual vigor and seeks understanding for students and teachers; especially when it comes to learning about the Christian faith as it is disclosed in Revelation.

The Bible students at DPC accomplished two objectives that minimize fear and increase understanding. The first objective was to create clearer understanding of Revelation as a genre called “apocalyptic literature.” It has its own literary style. John J. Collins explains,

Apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.³

² See Peter Thomas Johnson, “How Genre Sensitivity Might Help a Local Congregation Read Revelation,” D.Min. Project II, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2006. Denton Church is a small mainline PC (USA) church with 100 members. Revelation 1-15 was used for this project over a course of 18 weeks.

³ John J. Collins, “Introduction Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, ed. John J. Collins, *Semeia* 14, (1979), 9, quoted in Mitchell G. Reddish,

Since Revelation has its own literary style, the students of DPC approached Revelation with an appreciation of the genre. Further, the class decreased the students' intimidation because they acquired handles with which to grip the "hot potatoes" of apocalyptic imagery. Fear was minimized. Understanding was increased.

The second objective was to give tools to help us approach this genre with more confidence and less fear. Will these tools allow pastors of the HRP to make the same conclusions? That answer is found in this thesis-project. First, however, we must describe the setting of this project.

The Setting

Found on both sides of the Hudson River, the HRP see itself this way: "Spread out across 8 counties and 82 congregations, with more than 13,500 members, Hudson River Presbytery is a community of passionate people. Our many perspectives can challenge us, but our common commitment to the Gospel binds us, and invigorates our lives together."⁴

The HRP is asking itself three questions: "Where's the Holy Spirit leading us? What are compelling, creative and faithful expressions of ministry for this time? How are we being called to broaden and deepen as we follow Jesus Christ?"⁵

Revelation, Smyth and Helwys Commentary (Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2001), 4. See also Eugene M. Boring, *Revelation*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), 37.

⁴ Hudson River Presbytery, "Who We Are," March 5, 2018. <http://www.hudrivpres.org/index.php?t=1&o=1>.

⁵ Hudson River Presbytery, "Visioning: The Future and the Church: What This Is All About," March 5, 2018. <http://visioning.weebly.com>.

If the pastors of the HRP are seeking Spirit-filled creativity and are “being called to broaden and deepen as we follow Jesus Christ,” the Book of Revelation should be of help in expanding the breadth and depth of that vision. The methodology described in this project will expand the knowledge of Jesus Christ and his call. The HRP pastors and their congregations will benefit from the methodology discovered at DPC. This methodology will encourage the pastors of HRP who may be intimidated by the text. The methodology will also increase confidence as pastors learn to approach apocalyptic literature and its unique style with genre sensitivity. However, we must first discuss the problem this thesis-project identifies among the pastors of the HRP.

The Problem

One reason HRP pastors neglect Revelation is because of a lack of training. This affects their confidence in presenting the text of Revelation. I surveyed 72 of the HRP pastors.⁶ Thirty-four pastors responded to the survey.⁷ Most pastors confess to a lack of preparation provided by their respective seminaries and divinity schools. Three confessed to not having any courses in apocalyptic literature. Eight said they were prepared “hardly at all.” These pastors need help with the text of Revelation. An accessible tool for studying Revelation will help minimize the lack of training shared by HRP pastors. The DPC study guide should provide the necessary help.

Second, since there is a lack of training with regard to apocalyptic literature, the study guide emphasizes genre sensitivity. Genre sensitivity exposes exploitive literature.

⁶ Appendix D.

⁷ Appendix E.

Such literature is exploitive because it professes to be Biblically based but is theologically misinformed. The *Left Behind*⁸ series is a good example of such exploitation.⁹ This series of books sells by the millions.¹⁰ A self-advertisement reads,

Without any warning, passengers mysteriously disappear from their seats. Terror and chaos slowly spread not only through the plane but also worldwide as unusual events continue to unfold. For those who have been left behind, the apocalypse has just begun. This fictional account of life after the Rapture delivers an urgent call to today's readers to prepare their own hearts and minister to others.¹¹

The ad admits the books contain a “fictional account of life after the Rapture.” But it also “delivers an urgent call to today’s readers to prepare their own hearts.” Thus, it is hard to imagine *Left Behind* not having some negative effect on church people, especially if it keeps people from a true appreciation of Revelation as Scripture.¹²

For example, Michael Gorman tells a tale of exploitation.¹³ Commenting on the power of Revelation as Scripture, Gorman nevertheless gives a warning: “With respect to Revelation, it must be clearly stated that some readings are not only inferior to others, they are in fact unchristian and unhealthy.”¹⁴

⁸ Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1995).

⁹ Barbara R. Rossing, “End Game: Living Joyfully in an Apocalyptic Time,” *Christian Century*, November 11, 2006, 22-25. See also Jamie Manson, “Integrating Apocalypticism into Modern Theology: An Interview with Adela Yarbro Collins,” *Reflections* 92, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 12-15.

¹⁰ “Over 63 million sold” reads the web site. *Left Behind*, accessed March 1, 2018, <http://www.leftbehind.com>.

¹¹ *Left Behind*, accessed March 1, 2018, http://www.leftbehind.com/01_products/details.asp?isbn=978-0-8423-2912-5.

¹² Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 249.

¹³ Michael J. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), xi-xiii.

¹⁴ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, xiv.

This project is acutely aware that some people in congregations are exposed to this kind of exploitation. Pastors without training is a problem. They do not have the necessary tools for exploring and explaining Revelation thus leaving congregants to fend for themselves. Therefore, my thesis is addressed to the pastors of the HRP. But those who sit under the preaching and teaching of the HRP pastors are also kept in mind as this project moves along. Hereby exploitive literature will have less of an effect on congregants.

Left Behind may have its merits. The marketing of the franchise has been a success, especially in the United States. But its shortcomings also need to be addressed by pastors who understand the apocalyptic genre. It is hoped this project will provide such help. We do not want our people to be afraid of John's Apocalypse. Nor do we want them carrying false notions of God and the Gospel into their churches.

Does this kind of literature have any benefit? Perhaps this kind of literature provides some entertainment. But the fear factor it promotes is akin to the horror genre of Stephen King or Dean Koontz, not Biblical revelation. In other words, the fear and ignorance factor are in play as entertainment. Yet, readers are led to believe they are reading Biblical prophecies and probabilities. Alisa Wilkinson, a critic-at-large for *Christianity Today*, writes in *The Washington Post* on July 23, 2016:

This is the genius of the "Left Behind" books: They work on two levels. For the non-Christian reader, the traditional genre trappings and the mystery of what will happen next keep the pages turning. But *for the Christian reader, being able to read current events into the novel's narratives is thrilling, as is seeing how various elements of the Bible that are written as visions in Revelation* (dragons, beasts, women giving birth, horsemen, fiery pits, the symbol 666) might actually work out in contemporary America and the geopolitics beyond its borders.¹⁵

¹⁵ Alissa Wilkinson, "The 'Left Behind' Series was just the latest way America prepared for the Rapture," *The Washington Post*, July 13, 2016, accessed March 1, 2018,

This thesis-project will address the issue of reading modern phenomena into the texts of Revelation in Chapter Two. For now, suffice it to say, *Left Behind* should be left behind.¹⁶

The fact is, misunderstandings and confusion continue to reign. Genre sensitivity is not promoted. Therefore, readers of Revelation suffer. At last, Marva Dawn comments on how Revelation can be neglected when genre sensitivity is missing: “Some people avoid the Book of Revelation because they are frightened by the grotesque stories of supernatural warfare that are sometimes over-accentuated or falsely elaborated in anticipation of the end of time.”¹⁷

Therefore, a literary understanding of apocalyptic literature with an emphasis on genre sensitivity will encourage pastors and congregants to find comfort in the study guide. The DPC methodology helps HRP pastors and their congregants avoid exaggerations and misinterpretations. The study guide helps create genre sensitivity which leads to a more intelligent approach to Revelation.

Finally, with the proper tools and understanding of the genre, pastors approaching Revelation will discover the Gospel of Jesus Christ within the text. In fact, Revelation is a Gospel text told from within the genre called apocalyptic literature. What the Gospel looks like from within the genre will be further elucidated below. Pastors will be able to

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/act-four/wp/2016/07/13/the-left-behind-series-was-just-the-latest-way-america-prepared-for-the-rapture/?utm_term=.a5e1a0610575, emphasis mine.

¹⁶ Wilkinson concluded her article with, “It’s also true that the vast commercial ‘Left Behind’ empire is emblematic of commodified American religion in the 1990s and 2000s. It might have been satisfying for believers to see their passions become a mass-market hit. But moving product isn’t the same thing as putting people in the pews — or bringing about a long-awaited end of the world.”

¹⁷ Marva J. Dawn, *Joy in Our Weakness: A Gift of Hope from the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), xii.

approach the text with joy and confidence as they learn to recognize Jesus and his Gospel from within Revelation's pages. Joy and confidence are contagious! Hopefully, their congregations will be infected. The thesis of this project suggests that this is more than a possibility.

The Thesis Question

In light of the problem and setting, this thesis-project poses this primary research question: *what exegetical method can help HRP pastors preach and teach Revelation with confidence and joy that maintains genre sensitivity?*

Thesis: The preaching and teaching of the Book of Revelation can be done with confidence and joy for pastors in the HRP through normative exegetical practices¹⁸ while using God-given imagination prompted by the genre known as apocalyptic literature.

To test that thesis, I developed a study guide based on the methodology explained in this project. The methodology asks four questions of the Revelation text:

1. What apocalyptic literary devices are present and what do they signify in relationship to the Lamb-as-metaphor?
2. What is the historical context of John and the seven churches of Asia Minor?
3. What Old Testament references or allusions are present in any given text and what is their hermeneutical and/or exegetical purpose?
4. Is the cross, resurrection, and ascension depicted within the apocalyptic scenes, and if so, how do they inform the text?

¹⁸ Normative exegetical practices are those described in this thesis-project. Historical and critical, they take into account literary and genre-sensitive notions of Biblical exegesis and hermeneutics.

How I came to understand these as the most relevant questions for methodology and how I implemented them as tools for study is explained in Chapter Two. However, there is need for a word about hermeneutics.

L. L. Morris suggests there are four ways we can approach Revelation: preterist, historicist, futurist, and idealist or poetic.¹⁹ If I were to categorize my approach, I would say it has the characteristics of a historicist/futurist hermeneutic with attention to contemporary applications for the Church. This hermeneutic is coupled with a theological trajectory that is Christocentric in theory and practice. It is Lamb-centered.

I believe Revelation is an apocalyptic form of the Gospel. Therefore, I believe the command of Jesus, “Follow me,” is heard throughout the book for the seven churches in Asia Minor *and* the contemporary church of today. As will be shown below, what happens *when* the Church follows Christ is also pictured in the text of Revelation.

Thus, one could say a preterist view is also present because the subject of Rome’s oppression cannot be ignored. Lessons abound as Christ rules both then *and* now.²⁰ When it comes to Revelation and the four approaches listed above, Morris is correct, “a true view would combine elements from more than one of them.”²¹ The four tools will not answer every question. But they will put us on the trail in our pursuit of the Lamb.

¹⁹ L. L. Morris, *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary: Part 3*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1980), 1337-1339.

²⁰ “Revelation’s liturgical and missional spirituality (that is, a life of worship and witness) is the antithesis of religion that idolizes secular power,” (Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, xv).

²¹ Morris, *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 1338. Perhaps that is what I do here. Furthermore, there are a multitude of subjects scholars have investigated within the text of Revelation. For example, is Revelation prophecy, apocalypse, epistle, or eschatology? Or all of the above? And what of the subjects taken up in the book like heaven, hell, angels, Satan, etc.? Like those gathered around the throne in Revelation 7:9, there is a multitude!

Chapter Three is a literature review of scholars who have written about the hermeneutical and exegetical intricacies of Revelation. Their work provides depth and insight for this project. Chapter Four describes the project design. Once the methodology has been discussed, the chapter incorporates the material into a study guide. This study guide²² was made available to the pastors who expressed interest in using such a study guide.²³ A short evaluation form was attached to the study guide for feedback purposes.²⁴

Chapter Five will discuss the outcomes and research results from pastors who reviewed and critiqued the study guide. I share lessons learned in the conclusion.

I now move on to Chapter Two where I will share the four tools of a normative exegetical methodology that leads to hermeneutical insights regarding the subject of Revelation, Jesus of Nazareth.

²² Appendix G.

²³ Question 10 in Appendix B asks if pastors would be interested in such a study guide. Fifteen answered “yes.” Eighteen said they would need to preview the study guide before they would use it.

²⁴ Appendix H.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Genre sensitivity is one of the keys to understanding the Book of Revelation. Genre sensitivity provides help for pastors and students of Revelation seeking an intelligent and theologically sound path to scriptural interpretation. Why? Genre sensitivity leads to Gospel sensitivity. Revelation is a proclamation of the Gospel.

The purpose of this project is to provide four tools for students of Revelation so that the text of Revelation can be read and studied with, joy, imagination, and confidence. The tools can be summarized thusly: First tool—embrace the central metaphor of Revelation: The Lamb who was slaughtered but stands. Second tool—enter the historical context. Third tool—explore Old Testament references. Fourth tool—engage Revelation’s eschatological key: the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. This chapter encourages students of Revelation to explore the book with their imaginations and the tools provided. Since Revelation is Scripture, a reverential respect for the text is necessary.

Scripture is Sacred

I begin with suggesting the Biblical texts should be read with respect. Miroslav Volf explains,

Approaching the Bible as a genuinely sacred text calls for a *hermeneutic of respect* rather than a hermeneutic of suspicion. We approach it with an attitude of receptivity appropriate to the presumption...that it is a site of God’s self-

revelation. We read it expecting that by finding ourselves and our world in the story of God's dealings with humanity, we will (re)discover our true identities and the world's proper destiny. We study it anticipating that we will discover the wisdom to help individuals, communities, and our entire planet genuinely to flourish. We read it trusting that we will learn better to love God and neighbor.¹

Interpreting Scripture is both an art and a science. It is an art because, as I will state many times below, imagination is needed. A hermeneutic of respect allows imagination to have a say in the reception of the Biblical text. It presupposes that God is in relationship with humans and that humans want to communicate with God, however awkwardly they may do so. Therefore, a respectful reading complements the original writer's intent though it is not easily discernable. But, as Volf writes, "Texts aren't speakers. In the Bible, understood as the site of God's self-revelation, it is God who speaks."² Jesus is the Story behind the story. That is the ultimate respect I will give to the texts with which I will wrestle in this project. Scripture tells us that God reaches out to us, especially through the witness of the Scripture, primarily through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Book of Revelation gives testimony to Jesus' central place in God's plan and in Scripture as the Lamb of God. Thus, the Book of Revelation gives testimony about the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I will also show how there is a science involved with such a task. The science is not new. Genre sensitivity requires it. In this project, I will deal mainly with the genre called apocalyptic. Specifically, metaphor will be a major concern. The form and function of metaphor will be discussed with respect to what I believe is the main metaphor of Revelation—the Lamb. The four tools provide a method of applied science.

¹ Miroslav Volf, *Captive to the Word of God: Engaging the Scriptures for Contemporary Theological Reflection* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 34, emphasis his.

² Volf, *Captive to the Word of God*, 27.

The preacher of Revelation is wise to pay attention to the art and science of interpretation of apocalyptic literature. The preacher can use the toolbox provided because it contains four useful tools for sermon preparation. It is hoped that these tools will keep the preacher within the parameters of a healthy homiletical approach to the texts of Revelation and other apocalyptic texts.

The purpose of the project is to aid pastors (and students) into a sound Biblical pathway for interpreting such texts. Thus, the preaching pastor is being asked to do normative theological and exegetical work in preparation of messages on these texts. Since we are in an age of multimedia expression, Revelation will feed into such expression because it is tailor-made for multimedia with its visions, images and metaphors. I suggest that the preacher have fun with these texts while he/she maintains a healthy homiletical approach along with Biblical and theological integrity.

Using the four tools I will do two things. First, I will use a method that is critical. That is, it makes use of commentary, history, theology, and exegesis. Second, as suggested above, imagination will be guided by discipline. That is to say, art and science become partners in discerning the truths of God's Word. Interpreting apocalyptic literature is both art and science. Since this is so, a discussion of apocalyptic genre is in order.

Apocalyptic Literature

I will now discuss the genre called apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature has historical roots. This introductory material introduces the reader to the place apocalyptic literature has in the history of Jewish and Christian literature. The four tools

motivate interpreters to practice a logical, intelligent methodology for exegesis. For the purposes of this thesis-project, Revelation 4 and 5 will be the subject of this methodology.

In the conclusion of this chapter, I will summarize how genre sensitivity combined with the metaphorical understanding of Christ as the central image frees readers for an engaging study of Revelation. However, I must begin with a discussion of how genre sensitivity is a key to hearing the Gospel proclaimed in Revelation.

Genre Sensitivity is a Key to Understanding the Book of Revelation

Genre sensitivity leads to Gospel sensitivity. Gospel sensitivity induces respect for the one who came to serve, Jesus Christ. Revelation is a “servant vision” (Revelation 1:1-8). It is a book for the servants of God who may be suffering persecution or tempted to compromise their faith. Rosalind Banbury explains, “The people of God are suffering persecutions. John, himself, is on the small island of Patmos because of the ‘word of God and the testimony of Jesus’ (Revelation 1:9).”³

The image of the Lamb plays a pivotal role for God’s servants. These servants are subject to the one whose service provides them with salvation (Revelation 5:11, 12).⁴ This service is personified in “the Lamb who was slaughtered but stands” who conquers evil (Revelation 5:5-14). Revelation 14:4 reports God’s servants as those “who follow the Lamb wherever he goes.” They are “offered as first fruits to God and the Lamb.” Such

³ Rosalind Banbury, “An Apocalypse, an Author, and a Witness,” *The Presbyterian Outlook* 192, no. 16 (August 9, 2010): 25. All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version unless otherwise indicated.

⁴ See Appendix A for a detailed outline of Revelation.

images are endemic to the genre we call apocalyptic literature. They also echo Jesus' command, "Follow me!"⁵ Echoes of the Gospel are heard throughout the text of Revelation.

Since the language of Revelation is highly symbolic, we need to consider the meaning of metaphor. Metaphors are important literary devices in apocalyptic literature. More will be shown below how the Lamb who was slaughtered is the central metaphor of Revelation. For now, Peterson gives a definition: "A metaphor takes a word that is commonly used to refer to a thing or action that we experience by means of our five senses and then uses it to refer to something that is beyond the reach of our immediate senses."⁶ That is why imagination plays a central role in the exegetical task. With the metaphor, we participate in the action or meaning of the text. Peterson further explains,

Metaphor does that, makes me a participant in creating meaning and entering into the action of the word. I can no longer understand the word by looking it up in the dictionary, for it is no longer just itself. It is alive and moving, inviting me to participate in the meaning. When the writers of Scripture use metaphor, we get involved with God, whether we want to or not, sometimes whether we know it or not.⁷

The metaphorical implication of the hero form is central to understanding Revelation's vision in particular and as a whole. The Lamb who was slaughtered but stands serves such a purpose. God's servant (hero) leads God's servants (heroes) to final bliss. God's people find their identity in the Lamb who was slaughtered but stands.

⁵ *The New King James Version* records at least 37 times where the command of Jesus, "follow me," is used directly or indirectly as Jesus performs his ministry and calls disciples to his side in the Gospels. Harper Collins Christian Publishing, Inc, "Bible by Olive Tree," Apple App Store, vers. 7.2.4 (2018).

⁶ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Jesus Way: A Conversation on the Ways that Jesus Is the Way* (Eerdmans, MI: Grand Rapids, 2007), 25.

⁷ Peterson, *The Jesus Way*, 26.

The genre-sensitive student sees evil finding its apocalyptic expression as forces line up against God and God's hero(es). The forces of evil are unable to serve God (Revelation 11:18; 13:5-7; 16:6) or humankind (Revelation 18:3). Babylon serves only herself (Revelation 18:7). The kings of the earth represent those who would be served as if they were God (Revelation 18:17). God's servants sing the songs that exalt God over Babylon (Revelation 18:1-24). Further, Babylon's relationship to evil forces is revealed (Revelation 13:1-18). The Dragon, symbol for all that originates evil, is powerful yet controlled by God's permission to wreak havoc, even with God's people (Revelation 13:7).

Hereby we see how the path of God's people intertwines with the path of Jesus. This encouraging word from Revelation gives God's people hope in the midst of crises. The Gospel is enlarged in bold cinematic fashion. God's answer to evil is God's plan for the universe in Jesus Christ. Given these messianic implications of Revelation, we now turn to an examination of its Jewish apocalyptic influences.

Jewish Apocalyptic Background Behind Revelation

The Jewish apocalyptic background of Revelation is rooted in the Old Testament and non-canonical works.⁸ Daniel is perhaps most telling because of its inclusion in the canon and Jewish and Christian uses of its symbols. The "son of man" ("one like a human being," NRSV) who appears in Daniel 7 also appears in Revelation 1:13 and 14:14. He is purported either to have or will be given great power and authority,

⁸ See Appendix B for a representative list of Jewish and Christian apocalypses.

especially over the circumstances that may be overwhelming the community who receives the apocalypse.

Evil is a reality in Jewish apocalyptic literature. In the Daniel vision, “Someone as wicked as Antiochus would eventually be defeated by God. Therefore, they were not to give up hope, but were to remain faithful to God.”⁹ The function of such a form is to help God’s servants give a name to their enemy. It puts perspective on their own troubled times. Daniel’s circumstances play a huge role because of Israel/Judah’s time of captivity in Babylon. God’s dealings with Nebuchadnezzar, the “all-powerful” ruler of Babylon, show God’s power rules in the end.¹⁰

The use of the vision/dream where animals appear with strange configurations of body parts and combinations of human and animal appendages is also an apocalyptic image both books use (cf. Daniel 7:4-7 with Revelation 13:1-4). Perhaps these images preserve the holistic view of humans and animals. That is, all creation belongs to God. All are a gift of sorts. But creation is also subject to abuse by humankind.

A feature of apocalyptic is where the prophet finds himself as he receives the vision. Daniel and John differ in their locations. Daniel is not transported to another world/heaven like John. John is told to “come up here!” (Revelation 4:1) thus transporting him to a place where he can see heaven and its environs. This is typical of apocalypses with otherworldly journeys like the Jewish apocalyptic book 1 Enoch.

⁹ Mitchell G. Reddish, *Apocalyptic Literature* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 28. The same can be said about Babylonian captivity. How does one act when asked to sing a song of Zion? (Psalm 137)

¹⁰ See Daniel 2; especially vv. 46, 47.

First Enoch 17-20 begins to describe the habitations of spirit beings. More importantly, there is revealed to the writer the punishment of angels who are disobedient toward God (1 Enoch 19). He is given the names of angels that serve God (1 Enoch 20). This is important for reader/listeners of apocalypses. Crises necessitate explanations of perceived evil. We also need to know who is on our side. John, like Enoch, is shown the ultimate end of angels who practice disobedience (Revelation 20:10, 14).

Finally, though apocalyptic literature illustrates cosmic ramifications, apocalyptic literature comes out of the religious, social, and political milieu of its time. Not something new and mysterious, as if Christians invented a secret code, apocalyptic literature evolved from previous Jewish understandings of the end of the world.

The end of the world is both imminent and unpredictable in apocalyptic literature. Why? God is going to make all things right, eventually. But for now, God uses all things, including the evil of human beings and non-humans to bring about God's purposes. Apocalyptic literature can use myth, metaphor, allegory, symbol, and homologue to convey tensions and resolutions to personal and world crises.¹¹ Adela Yarbro Collins observes:

The main characteristics [of apocalyptic literature] are a contrast between earth and heaven and a contrast between this age and a new age, so that earth and this age are both seen as full of evil and suffering. ...The heavenly world and the new age are invisible and inaccessible, except by means of revelation through visions or journeys to normally inaccessible places.¹²

¹¹ Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 255.

¹² Jamie Manson, "Integrating Apocalyptic into Modern Theology: An Interview with Adela Yarbro Collins," *Reflections* 92, no. 1 (Spring, 2005): 10.

Creation in its entirety is a subject of apocalyptic literature. The cosmos is not off limits when it comes to the apocalyptic vision. With regard to Revelation, “John’s highly symbolic language nests urban Asia Minor into ever-larger contexts—ultimately into a cosmic vision that includes the whole social order, the totality of nature, and suprahuman divinities that invade but transcend both society and nature.”¹³ The Jewish background for Revelation helps us see Revelation as a fitting ending to the Scriptures. Jewish background also shares continuity with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Genre sensitivity also requires that we be aware of the difference between literal and literary. After clarifying the difference, we will look at the four tools for approaching apocalyptic literature with an accurate understanding of the literary function of Revelation.

Literal or Literary?

A hermeneutic of respect requires that we interpret the text with integrity. That is, we must know the difference between “literal” and “literary” when reading the texts of Revelation.

Many readers are led astray by a *literal* approach to the study of Revelation. A literal approach tends toward a one-to-one identification of image with some known object. As Boring writes, “Revelation is not code-language. . . . Code-language represents one letter, word, and concept by another in such a manner that the encoded language can be decoded into another language. Code is thus a kind of *literal* language. This is

¹³ Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York, NY: Oxford Press, 1990), 5.

different from John's *symbolic* language, which is polyvalent."¹⁴ Polyvalent language requires genre sensitivity and imagination.

Revelation 9:7-10 is an example of symbolic language.

In appearance the locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. (NIV)

One popular writer refers to these creatures as the Huey Cobra helicopters used by troops in Vietnam.¹⁵ Students of Revelation who are genre sensitive understand that neither John nor his audience could possibly know about such things. Fee agrees, Revelation "was *not* intended to prophesy the existence of Communist China, for example, or to give us literal details of the conclusion of history."¹⁶ Readers of Revelation should avoid literalism.

On the other hand, if we take a *literary* approach, we are struck by the image as it relates to the chapter as a whole.¹⁷ In other words, evil is ugly and John uses his sanctified imagination as it is informed by the vision and his Old Testament data bank to illustrate the fact. But evil also has a human face. In fact, it can be argued that evil is powerless until it finds a way to incarnate itself. Reddish quotes G.B. Caird, "Evil may

¹⁴ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), 54.

¹⁵ Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2001), 186.

¹⁶ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 263. See also Barbara R. Rossing, "End Game: Living Joyfully in an Apocalyptic Time," *Christian Century*, November 11, 2006, 22-25, where she writes about abuse of power.

¹⁷ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 259.

take many sinister forms and ramify far beyond the immediate implications of individual sin; but in the last analysis it has a human face, for it is caused by the rebellion of human will against the will of God.”¹⁸ A literary approach frees us to examine the image of evil. More importantly, as with all of Scripture, self-examination is encouraged. After all, evil and its human face are a common experience among all Christians, no matter what century.¹⁹

A literary approach is genre sensitive and causes imagination to flourish. A literary approach frees imaginations for joyful, fearless study of apocalyptic literature like Revelation. A literary approach enlivens the exegetical task. The story of the Gospel expands in dramatic ways. The difference between literal and literary will be kept in mind in the next section where I perform the exegesis of Revelation 4 and 5 using the four tools.

Apocalyptic Literature and the Four Tools: Enlarging Gospel Sensitivity

Genre sensitivity empowers the student of Scripture to better understand the Book of Revelation. The genre-sensitive student is invited to use the four tools listed below for a better appreciation of the Revelation text as it enlarges and retells the Gospel story.

First tool—embrace the central metaphor of Revelation: The Lamb who was slaughtered but stands.

Second tool—enter the historical context.

¹⁸ Reddish, *Revelation*, 186.

¹⁹ It should be noted that this part of John’s vision related to a present threat to continued Roman domination. Long-haired enemies known as the Parthians were fierce warriors who threatened the Roman Empire. “The depiction of Parthia as a victorious army marching across the world stage would have been a frightening image for John’s readers” (Reddish, *Revelation*, 126).

Third tool—explore Old Testament references.

Fourth tool—engage Revelation’s eschatological key: the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

First, embrace the revelatory metaphor of the Lamb. This image drips with Old Testament and New Testament meaning. Between the sacrificial lamb of Exodus and Lamb of God in John’s Gospel, we are reminded of God’s plan of salvation. This plan includes the sacrifice of the Son of God for the sin of the world. In Revelation, the Lamb appears as a slaughtered lamb yet it “stands” (ἔστηκεν) alive! The Lamb is a symbol for the student of Revelation who wishes to evoke the powerful nuances the metaphor provides. The following study depends on the vision of the Lamb.

Second, enter the historical context. John writes to seven churches in Asia Minor (Revelation 2, 3) each of whom has a historical context. Peterson writes,

St. John is not concerned with heaven and hell as things in themselves. He has no interest in judgment and blessing apart from the persons to whom he is pastor. He does not speculate or theorize. Every word, every number, every vision, every song is put to immediate use among these persons in the seven little congregations to which he is pastor.²⁰

In other words, faithfulness transcends history and is the call to every generation. The cross of Christ frees us from the traps of cultural ideologies. We become powerful witnesses to the truth of God in Christ. If faithfulness to the Gospel transcends history, it also grounds readers in history as faithful witnesses to and for the Gospel.

Third, explore Old Testament references. “Revelation is saturated with allusions to the Old Testament, showing that the author’s mind was itself steeped in Scripture, the words and images of which were available to provide the raw material for his visions, and

²⁰ Eugene H. Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1989), 9. See also Boring, *Revelation*, 8ff.

the literary means by which to later express them.”²¹ The study of Revelation is enhanced with a working knowledge of the Old Testament.

Fourth, engage Revelation’s eschatological key. History is forever changed because of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension. Revelation 1:5 introduces us to the ascended Christ whose very being changes the world forever. Revelation 4 anticipates this change and prepares readers for a crucified Messiah who also is alive ruling the world. Revelation 5 exalts the Lamb who was slaughtered, but lives.

The exegetical task lies just ahead. I begin with Revelation 4 as it anticipates Revelation 5. The four tools will be used in the following exegesis section with emphasis on the first tool: embracing the central metaphor of the Lamb. The metaphor of the Lamb is a literary anchor for those who would explore Revelation with intelligence and imagination.

Revelation 4 Anticipates Revelation 5 and the Unveiling of the Lamb

Revelation 4 prepares the reader for Revelation 5 by describing the indescribable. Revelation 4 anticipates the unveiling of the Lamb in Revelation 5. Such scenes are typical of apocalyptic literature.²² We are invited to participate in the action through the apocalyptic literary forms employed by the writer who employs his database of Old Testament references and allusions.

²¹ Boring, *Revelation*, 27.

²² Adela Yarbro Collins, “Apocalyptic Themes in Biblical Literature,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 53, no 2 (April 1999), 117. See also Charles L. Holman, *Till Jesus Comes* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 40; Reddish, *Apocalyptic Literature*, 21; and Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 18, 19.

For example, in 4:1 John is told to “Come up here!” (ἀνάβα ὧδε) so that he can see “what must take place after this” (ὃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα). The communication of “what takes place after this” will be the prophetic ministry of John. According to Boring, “John’s vision...is the literary expression in traditional terms of his prophetic experience, carefully composed to communicate theological meaning.”²³ Revelation 4 begins a dramatic movement to unveil the Lamb of God in Revelation 5.

First, John sees the throne room of God. Old Testament knowledge feeds John’s database for his vision. He writes, “There in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne” (ἵδοὺ θρόνος ἔκειτο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος) (Revelation 4:2). Boring speaks with genre sensitivity when he writes, “In John’s vision there is a throne room for the universe and that throne is not vacant. The universe is not chaos nor is it ruled by blind fate. Someone is in charge. The words ‘one seated on the throne’ occurs twelve times in Revelation; it is John’s way of saying ‘God.’”²⁴ If God is on the throne, a powerful, sovereign God orchestrates all that happens next.

Second, John’s vision displays the perfection or completeness of God’s being, power, and rule. In fact, God’s power is overwhelming. Yet, we suspect there is more to this unveiling of God’s power. Revelation 4:3-11 describe in detail the various ways this is envisioned. Precious jewels and a rainbow describe the center of the throne (Revelation 4:3). There is present around the throne “twenty-four thrones with twenty-four elders with white robes and gold crowns” (θρόνους εἴκοσι τέσσαρες, καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς θρόνους

²³ Boring, *Revelation*, 102.

²⁴ Boring, *Revelation*, 102, 103.

εἴκοσι τέσσαρας πρεσβυτέρους καθημένους περιβεβλημένους ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν στεφάνους χρυσοῦς) (Revelation 4:4).

Further, Revelation 4:5 emphasizes the notion of perfection or completeness. The lightning, thunder, and the “seven spirits of God” (τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ) envision perfect/complete power. Revelation 4:6 captures the idea of purity or genuineness with its sea of glass “like crystal” (ὁμοία κρυστάλλῳ). As mentioned above, we are also aware of Old Testament motifs with Noah, Mt. Sinai, and Isaiah.

Third, John continues his use of the Old Testament images. These images begin to create an atmosphere of expectation. Mounce notes the creative imagination of John as he borrows from Ezekiel 1 and Isaiah 6. There are six wings instead of four (Ezekiel). Their bodies are full of eyes instead of the wheels Ezekiel sees in his vision. Isaiah and John hear a similar chorus, “Holy, holy, holy.” Thus, we find “a good example of John’s freedom to transform the images of his sources, blend them, and so create new images.”²⁵ Genre-sensitive readers will delight in this creativity and use of imagination, especially as we notice how John employs the Old Testament to reveal the Gospel with apocalyptic images.

Further, these creatures not only see, they sing, “day and night without ceasing” (ἀνάπαυσιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς) (Revelation 4:8). From the fullness that exists within the presence of God, comes a song to God that expresses a perfect or complete response to that very presence, “Holy, holy, holy” (Ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος). The sense of Other is accentuated, especially in contrast with worldly power. The otherworldliness contributes to a tension that may cause John to weep.

²⁵ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 124.

Fourth, there are historical questions about persecution of Christians. Most scholars agree that Revelation was written during the reign of Emperor Domitian. If so, John provides a response to persecution. It is questionable, however, whether this persecution is official or local. Thompson makes reference to Sweet's observation that persecution is only occasional. If so, we can agree, "The chief dangers were complacency and compromise."²⁶

However, Revelation depicts real tension between the emperor cult and Christianity. As Mounce observes, "To churches about to enter a period of severe testing and persecution, a declaration of God's unlimited might would bring strength and encouragement."²⁷

John's creativity, then, will more than encourage his listeners.²⁸ In fact, Revelation 4-5 will surprise them. Genre-sensitive reader/listeners will delight in the disclosure, as the Gospel of Jesus Christ is powerfully proclaimed through the lens of apocalyptic literature.

Fifth, John creatively uses words that convey a certain amusement in dramatizing the unrelenting energy of Heaven. John playfully describes a snowball effect thus accentuating the anticipation of that which is revealed in Revelation 5. Καὶ ὅταν δώσουσιν introduces Revelation 4:9. Zerwick says the use of ὅταν with δώσουσιν combined with the three future verb forms in Revelation 4:10 (πρὸς οὐρανὸν ἔσονται ...

²⁶ Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 16.

²⁷ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 125, 126.

²⁸ Boring, *Revelation*, 5.

προσκυνήσουσιν ... βαλοῦσιν) may represent a certain Hebraism.²⁹ That is, when the temporal adverb takes its place at the beginning of the sentence with future verbs following,³⁰ a verbal snowball effect is created. Since “day and night without ceasing they sing, ‘Holy, holy, holy,’” there is an exponential increase of giving “glory and honor and thanks” (δόξαν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ εὐχαριστίαν τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ) to God (Revelation 4:8). In other words, one thing leads to another. The elders will, following the response of the creatures, “fall...worship...and cast their crowns” before God (Revelation 4:10). Attentive listeners are caught up in this activity as they begin to anticipate what comes next.

Finally, Revelation 4 delightfully anticipates the Gospel of redemption in Revelation 5 as the text builds toward a crescendo of praise to God. An avalanche of praise highlights an already awesome spectacle of power in the throne room of God whose plan for redemption is revealed in the Gospel.

Revelation 5, however, will also surprise its readers with the Gospel notion of power, the power of the Lamb. This is why the metaphor of the Lamb who was slaughtered but stands is the primary image of Revelation.³¹ It anchors both teacher and student in the message of redemption and the Gospel. Genre sensitivity in the study of Revelation is a necessity for us to see how the Gospel is dramatized in Revelation 5. The drama begins with a question.

²⁹ Maximilion Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the New Testament* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979), 750.

³⁰ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 592.

³¹ Rossing, “End Game,” 222-225 and Marva J. Dawn, *Joy in Our Weakness: A Gift of Hope from the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 6ff.

“Who Is Worthy?” Revelation 5:1-5

Revelation 5:1-5 continues to create anticipation as a crucial question is asked of John and John’s reader/listeners. The main question appears to be “Who is worthy?” (τίς ἄξιός) (Revelation 5:2). That word ἄξιός refers to that quality of character whereby one’s worth is measurable in terms of appropriateness and by the position that one is found to occupy.³² With regard to the scroll (βιβλίον), Charles writes, “The ‘worthiness’ (ἄξιός) is the inner ethical presupposition of the ability to open the Book.”³³

Second, the question of worthiness is a motif found in apocalyptic literature as we enter historical and literary considerations. Aune shows a literary similarity to *Odes Sol.* 23:5-22.³⁴ Here we find a sealed document from Heaven that no one can open. The document eludes all pretenders until a “wheel” receives the letter and overcomes all opposition (Revelation 23:11-16).³⁵ With the letter now opened, the “Son of Truth” is revealed to be supreme head of whatever the “Most High Father” sees fit, including the destruction of all opposition. A Trinitarian formula closes the piece with an emphasis on the eternal rule of “Father ... Son ... and Holy Spirit.”³⁶

There is a critical observation germane to this project. Aune lists several similarities and differences between Revelation 5 and the passage from *Odes Sol.* The

³² W. Forester, “ἄξιός,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 63.

³³ R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John in Two Volumes* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 139.

³⁴ David E. Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 52a, *Revelation 1-5* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1997), 329.

³⁵ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 329.

³⁶ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 330. Apparently, the book is itself the “Son of Truth.” Genre sensitivity and imagination are in play.

observation is genre sensitive with special regard to the central metaphor we find in Revelation: The Lamb who was slaughtered but stands. The first tool implores us to embrace the metaphor of the Lamb. Aune writes, “A heavenly document that is sealed cannot be opened by anyone. Only one had the power to take the document and reveal its significance. In both scenarios, the sovereignty of a major heavenly figure is revealed, the Lamb in Revelation 5:1-4 and the Son of Truth in *Odes Sol.* 23:5-22.”³⁷

Revelation unveils the “major heavenly figure” to be the Lamb. John surprises his audience with this notion of redemption. As we embrace the metaphor of the Lamb, the metaphor opens our minds to the uniqueness of Jesus and the Gospel he continues to proclaim. There is more evidence that occupies our imaginations as we use the second tool and enter more historical ground below.

Aune discusses this evidence while maintaining genre sensitivity. He compares Revelation 5:1-4 with certain Greek hymns. Specifically, he mentions the *Aporia* hymns, songs that begin with a dilemma. For example, in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 19, 207, the singer poses a question, “How, then, shall I sing of you, who are in all ways worthy of song?” Or in the *Iliad* 11.218-19, the question comes forth, “Tell me now, Muses, with dwelling on Olympus, *who* was it that first came to face Agamemnon?”³⁸

The question of worthiness reveals a dilemma in the Book of Revelation. John, sensitive to his apocalyptic genre, uses *Aporia*. “Who is worthy to open the scroll?” Given the events that led up to the question, it is no wonder John describes himself as being overcome with emotion. Aune concludes his observations, “In Revelation 5:2, the

³⁷ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 330.

³⁸ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 330.

Aporia deals not with the problem of *how* to praise but rather with the question of *who* should be praised, and the identity of that person is the object of a verbal revelation to John by one of the elders (5:5).”³⁹

Does the question of worthiness intensify expectations? Aune’s citation of Aristotle is appropriate. “There are, also, many useful ways of heightening the effect of praise. We must, for instance, point out that a [person] is the only one, or the first, or almost the only one who has done something, or that he has done it better than anyone else; all these distinctions are honorable (*Rhetoric* 1.9.1368a).”⁴⁰ What better way to approach the Gospel and the revelation of the Lamb in Revelation 5?

The Gospel of Redemption: Revelation 5

Genre sensitivity requires us to be alert to the way the author uses metaphors and symbols. In the case of Revelation 5, we find the Lamb who was slaughtered but stands. The Gospel is revealed through the activity of the throne room of God in Revelation 4. All eyes are on God who sits on the throne as God’s heavenly court declares God’s greatness as sovereign Lord and creator. Therefore, a song of praise is sung to acknowledge this work of God. Thus, God is lifted up as the One who rules all things.

Suddenly, God on the throne is holding a scroll. Given the powerful images John uses to convey God’s greatness, we can only imagine what the scroll contains with its seven seals. If we are looking for a hero, the text sets up the readers to receive one.

³⁹ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 331.

⁴⁰ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 331, 332.

The anticipation is great and because he is on this otherworldly journey, John is a full participant. His tears reveal one who is in tune with the great event. Peterson writes, “In the midst of the splendor, surrounded with this vitality, immersed in the act of worship that centered life and gathered all things before God, St. John was not satisfied: ‘I wept much’.”⁴¹ The NRSV reads, “And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it” (Revelation 5:4).

What happens next forms the purpose of Revelation as the Gospel is proclaimed through the beatific vision of the Lamb. Following is my own translation of the Revelation 5 text revealing the Lamb.

Revelation 5:5-10

And one of the Elders
Says to me,
“Cry not! Behold,
Judah’s Lion,
David’s Root,
He conquered!
He can open
The Scroll
With its
Seven seals.”

And I saw
In the middle of the throne,
And the 4 living creatures
And the Elders,
A Lamb,
Slaughtered but
Standing.
Seven horns, seven eyes (the seven Spirits of God)
He has,
Seeing all the earth.

He went and took the Scroll from the right hand of God who sits upon the throne!

⁴¹ Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 64.

After he took the Scroll,
With harps
And golden bowls
Incense filled like prayers of saints,
They fell,
Flat,
These Elders prone,
With creatures on the throne,
Floored.

A new song!
Sung with worthwhile words:
“For the worthy one
Whose Scroll taking
And seal busting
Are hard won
For God
In the slaughter of Innocence,
Blood buys tribe and tongue,
Person and population.

Poet and people maker,
You make them into
God’s kingdom,
A priestly population
Serving God,
Ruling Earth.”

Genre sensitivity recognizes the demonstrable irony in Revelation 5 as the Gospel is revealed in the person of Jesus, the Lamb. There are five observations that are genre-specific regarding the dramatic events of Revelation 4 and 5.

First, there is the genre-sensitive notion of language. “The language of Revelation is more like that of poetry than that of a set of directions (as in a cookbook), the language plays through a range of meanings rather than having only one meaning.”⁴² The Lion of Judah image (ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰούδα) (Revelation 5), reaches back into the Old

⁴² Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 34

Testament and speaks of the majesty of Judah. Judah will produce the Messiah in terms of Jesus' humanity.

However, the Lion is also the Lamb. The Lamb (ἀρνίον) is not just any lamb. This Lamb is the Lamb "slaughtered but standing" (ἐσθηκὸς ὡς ἐσφαγμένον). This is a unique and ironic twist in tune with the apocalyptic genre it represents. C.K. Barrett explains, "In Revelation we see an author making various attempts to broaden the use of the Lamb image by combining it with other apocalyptic formulas."⁴³

Second, the Lamb image influences Christology. Boring contends with Hal Lindsey's *There Is A New World Coming* (1973).⁴⁴ Boring discusses Lindsey's thesis that Jesus is the Lamb at his first coming but will be the Lion at his second coming. In other words, those who do not submit to the Lamb will be torn apart by the Lion. Boring calls this line of reasoning the "polar opposite of the meaning of the text of Revelation."⁴⁵ Further, Boring says, "It represents retrogression from a Christian understanding of the meaning of Messiahship to the pre-Christian apocalyptic idea."⁴⁶ I would also ask if Mr. Lindsey's theory lines up with the good news of the Gospel?

Genre sensitivity makes us aware of a Christological tension. As Arthurs points out, "Tension is not an end in itself. In biblical literature it is a means addressing

⁴³ C.K. Barrett, "The Lamb of God," *New Testament Studies*, no. 1 (February 1955), 216.

⁴⁴ Boring, *Revelation*, 109. The chapter Boring takes issue with is the one entitled "The Lamb Becomes a Lion."

⁴⁵ Boring, *Revelation*, 109.

⁴⁶ Boring, *Revelation*, 102. See also Rossing, "End Game," 23-25.

rhetorically the situation of the recipients, to produce hope and praise.”⁴⁷ Arthurs quotes Fred Craddock, “In apocalyptic, we ‘see through what is going on to what is really going on.’”⁴⁸ That is, redemption comes via a crucified Christ. The Lamb personifies the Gospel and its message of redemption through the sacrifice of Christ.

The Lamb image is the primary image causing this tension. The crucified Jesus is worthy to open the scrolls. If he is seen as a Lion (and he is!), there is a tension created by the Lion whose Lamb-like qualities appear to outweigh the Lion-like potential to tear apart the unfaithful. The power of the Lamb is the power of God. Boring is correct because the Lamb image is meant to control all other images. High Christology resides in the lowly Lamb.

Third, there are the power issues that cross over into Roman politics. The Lamb stands in protest to authority gone awry. The revelation of the Lamb is meant to serve the ironic twist necessary to gain the attention of John’s readers who may be complacent in their faith or fearful of imperial power. For example, Kraybill suggests a compromising attitude toward Rome could affect one’s faith.⁴⁹ Michael Gorman explains further, “As Christian individuals and communities in Asia Minor interacted with family members, friends, business associates, and public officials who did not share their conviction that

⁴⁷ Jeffrey D. Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety: How to Re-Crete the Dynamics of Biblical Genres* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007), 191.

⁴⁸ Fred B. Craddock, “Preaching the Book of Revelation,” *Interpretation*, 40, no. 3, (1986), 275, quoted in Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety*, 191.

⁴⁹ J. Nelson Kraybill, “Imperial Cult and Commerce in John’s Apocalypse,” *JSNTSup* 132, (Sheffield: Sheffield and Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 262.

‘Jesus is Lord,’ the basic early Christian confession (Romans 10:9), these believers were faced with hard questions and decisions.”⁵⁰

Brueggemann enlists the prophetic imagination for fighting off such temptations. He writes, “It is the task of the prophetic community to present an alternative consciousness that can energize the community to fresh forms of faithfulness and vitality.”⁵¹ John does so by disclosing the Lamb as the heart of the Book of Revelation. Such a disclosure is important for genre sensitivity.

We can use the fourth tool—engage eschatological implications. When we consider the Lamb as metaphor some obvious conclusions immerge. Jesus Christ is exalted beyond words for his work on the cross, his vindicating resurrection, and his eventual ascension to the right hand of God where “his name is above every name.” (Philippians 2:5ff.) The Roman Empire can never be the same if Jesus’ name is above all names, including that of Caesar. The world will never be the same.

Fourth, John’s use of language and his choice of words are unique. The word for “lamb” (ἀρνίον) is the only form used in Revelation. Charles writes, “The word is used twenty-nine times in twelve chapters of the Apocalypse as a designation of the crucified Messiah.”⁵² It is the diminutive form (“lamby” or “lambkins”). As we use the second tool—explore Old Testament references—Isaiah 53 plays a large role in defining the Lamb in Revelation, as does Jesus’ own life in the Gospel. Therefore, if we expect the Lion of Judah to tear apart his enemies, we will find instead a crucified Lord whose

⁵⁰ Michael J. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 31.

⁵¹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1978), 62.

⁵² Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 141.

Gospel message is one of redemption (ἡγόρασας) (Revelation 9). Are there other images in the New Testament that give testimony to this interpretation?

“Christ Crucified”⁵³ (Χριστὸν ἐσταυρωμένον) is an explicit title in the New Testament. It captures the essence of Jesus of Nazareth (Ἰησοῦν ζητεῖτε τὸν Ναζαρηνὸν τὸν ἐσταυρωμένον).⁵⁴ “Slaughtered Lamb” serves a similar function. Charles quotes Weiss who says, “The conceptions of the Book and the Lamb are to be regarded as ‘the kernel of the Vision.’”⁵⁵ If this is so, “Crucifixion is the definitive act which stamps its character on the identity of Christ, and is thus definitive of the identity of God.”⁵⁶ This brings a unique trajectory to the meaning of the metaphor, “Lamb.” When we talk about the Lamb in Revelation, we are talking about the Gospel.

Fifth, that is why; finally, John offers a vision of self-identity for those who choose to follow the Lamb. If John’s prophecy is a revelation of God; it is also a revelation of their experience of the Gospel. They are the redeemed that the Lamb has purchased. They are reminded of this joyful fact every worship day.

The book ends with bliss for the servants of the Lamb (22:3). Service to God is personified in the Lamb who rewards his servants. This reward includes the identity of “child of God.” “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God”

⁵³ 1 Corinthians 1:23.

⁵⁴ Mark 16:6.

⁵⁵ Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 141.

⁵⁶ Boring, *Revelation*, 109.

(Ephesians 5:1, 2). Thus, we find the metaphor of the Lamb who was slaughtered to be the model for God's servants who are also the "dearly loved children."

What about evil? Jesus is the Lamb slaughtered. Evil has its way with him. His surrender is not only to God, but also to evil forces that *seem* to be in control. God, however, overcomes with a resurrection (ἀρνίον ἐστηκὸς ὡς ἐσφαγμένον). How much more should God's servants see their humiliation and the world's chaos/crisis as consistent with the experience of the Lamb whom they serve? How different is their experience from what John's imagery tries to communicate? Banbury reminds us, "Given the daily news of the longest war in U.S. history...the low confidence in our institutions, we too may long for the day when God intervenes decisively to conquer the destructive powers of wickedness and bring healing and restoration."⁵⁷

How do the work of Christ and the being of Christ help Christians in their struggle against compromise? What eschatological power do we share with those in Asia Minor? If we are on the lookout for the cross, resurrection and ascension, we may be further surprised. Genre sensitivity encourages such a notion as the heart of the Gospel is revealed.

The Fourth Tool—Engage Revelation's Eschatological Key

There is a powerful eschatological motif in Revelation 1:5. This eschatological motif is present throughout Revelation, especially in concurrence with the vision of Revelation 5. Jesus is called "witness" (ὁ μάρτυς), "faithful one" (ὁ πιστός), "first born

⁵⁷ Banbury, "An Apocalypse, an Author, and a Witness," 25.

from the dead” (ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν), and “the ruler of the rulers of the earth” (ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς).⁵⁸

As readers anticipate what is next, “the witness who is faithful” or “the faithful witness” reminds genre-sensitive readers of Jesus before Pilate (Matthew 27:15-26/Mark 15:5-16/Luke 23:13-25/John 19:1-10). Pauline truth speaks of this moment in 1 Timothy 6:12-13 as witness or testimony and relates it to the Christian life. “Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession” (NRSV).

Jesus is the faithful witness who goes to the cross. Since he is the Lamb who stands, he is also “first born from the dead.” He is the resurrected one. But he is also the ascended one. Philippians 2:9 reminds us, “Therefore God highly exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that’s above every other name” (NIV). Jesus “rules the rulers of the earth” by virtue of his being and by virtue of his work.

The Lamb, the crucified Christ, the resurrected and ascended one holds all authority. Thus, the world has changed. Peterson argues, “We live in a world where Christ is King. If Christ is King, everything, quite literally, every *thing* and every *one*, has to be re-imagined, re-configured, re-oriented to a way of life that consists in an obedient following of Jesus.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, “A total renovation of our imagination, our way of

⁵⁸ Notice the article (ὁ) in front of each title. This article accentuates the title thus exalting Jesus.

⁵⁹ Peterson, *The Jesus Way*, 35.

looking at things—what Jesus commanded in his no-nonsense imperative, ‘Repent!’—is required.”⁶⁰ The Lamb who was slaughtered but stands personifies these apocalyptic themes. The Gospel story is told again with apocalyptic images that comfort and challenge Christians as they, like Jesus, give their lives to the one who sits on the throne.

Conclusion

After discussing elements of apocalyptic literature, I identify four tools for pastors and students of Revelation. They are:

First tool—embrace the central metaphor.

Second tool—enter the historical context.

Third tool—explore Old Testament references.

Fourth tool—engage Revelation’s eschatological key: the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

The four tools foster genre sensitivity. The four tools guide this project in the exegetical task. The four tools help encourage sanctified imaginations in one’s reading and study of Revelation as art and science work together in the exegetical process. With the four tools, we encounter the Gospel in powerful and surprising ways. The Lamb acts as the guiding metaphor for the hermeneutical task. In the next chapter, using a literature review format, I will show how various scholars influence my thinking in this project with some of the finer details of the exegetical and theological task.

⁶⁰ Peterson, *The Jesus Way*, 35.

CHAPTER THREE

A LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Revelation is a unique presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. My thesis is that the preaching and teaching of the Book of Revelation can be done with confidence and joy for pastors in the Hudson River Presbytery through normative exegetical practices while using God-given imagination prompted by the genre known as apocalyptic literature. This project gives students of Revelation four tools to help them in that endeavor. In the previous chapter, I show how the four tools highlight the Gospel through normative exegetical practice. First, we embrace the central metaphor of the Lamb in Revelation 5. Second, we enter the historical context. Third, we explore Old Testament references. Fourth, we engage Revelation's eschatological key—the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

This chapter continues to explore my thesis regarding the accessibility of the Revelation texts through normative exegetical practice using the four tools outlined in Chapter Two. The following literature review highlights the work of scholars and exegetes who influence this project. Their work in Revelation provides depth and insight that challenge and confirm the thesis of this project.

I begin with what Marva Dawn calls a “Theology of Weakness.” The Lamb who was slaughtered but stands fits into this theological trajectory. I follow up on this thought with a discussion entitled “Theological Exegesis” where exegetes Barbara Rossing, M. Eugene Boring, and Adele Yarbro Collins discuss their exegetical notions about the

image of the Lamb. How does God's weakness challenge the power of humankind?

Mitchell Reddish has much to offer as he and Eugene Peterson notice how first-century temptations run concurrent with 21st century temptations.

Finally, in "Why the Tools?" I engage in a discussion with Boring, Mounce, and Aune. I highlight three of the four tools in this discussion: embrace the Lamb, explore the Old Testament, and engage the eschatological key.

A Theology of Weakness

For the foolishness of God is wiser than humankind's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than humankind's strength.

—1 Corinthians 1:25

The exegetical work of those I mention below in this literature review illustrates how I arrive at my conclusions about the key metaphor of Revelation, the Lamb. Specifically, I show how the image of the Lamb connotes weakness. This is a stumbling block for many, including believers. The theology that emerges from this exegetical study of Revelation considers God's foolishness and weakness as stronger than humankind's wisdom and strength. The Lamb who enters the vision in Revelation 5 illustrates the wisdom of the cross and the power of God in the Book of Revelation.

Marva J. Dawn's hermeneutic is instructive and illustrative of the theology behind this project. In her book, *Joy In Our Weakness: A Gift of Hope from the Book of Revelation*, she counters Christian triumphalism.¹ Dawn is responsive to the apocalyptic

¹ Marva J. Dawn, *Joy in Our Weakness: A Gift of Hope from the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), x-xiv, 17. See also Brian K. Blount, *Can I Get a Witness? Reading Revelation through African American Culture* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Westminster Press, 2005), 69-71.

message of Revelation within its literary context.² She introduces what she calls a “theology of weakness.” On that subject, she writes, “How outstanding it is to realize that God’s best ‘economy’ was to use the suffering and death of Christ and the weakness of His followers for the fulfillment of the divine purpose manifested in Christ.”³ Furthermore, the irony of the Lamb testifies to God’s unexpected “economy” as we are reminded once again about Gospel motifs. Blount writes, “The complete formulation, *slaughtered Lamb*, operates for John the way parables operated for Jesus, taking on qualities people expect, then overturning them.”⁴

The Lamb’s “success” is seen by the world as a failure. However, in the mind of John and his churches, the image of the Lamb becomes the most engaging of metaphors. That is, through his “weakness” he is victorious. Or, as the Apostle Paul puts it, “We speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Corinthians 2:7, 8). This example from 1 Corinthians indicates the irony associated with the Lamb metaphor, especially as he is seen as the Lamb who was slaughtered but stands.

² Dawn, *Joy in Our Weakness*, 6ff.

³ Dawn, *Joy in Our Weakness*, 27.

⁴ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness?*, 70, 71.

Theological Exegesis: Attending to Genre and Literary Considerations

I bring Dawn's work into conversation with Barbara R. Rossing.⁵ Rossing speaks of the misuse of Revelation by those in power. "The problem arises when talk of the apocalypse is taken up by the powerful. Revelation is not a script or battle plan for those in power. To the extent that we are the ones in power we need to be very careful about how we deploy apocalyptic rhetoric."⁶ This is a word to the wise who preach the texts of Revelation.

Along with Dawn, Rossing believes the Lamb is to be the main metaphor that controls the interpretation of Revelation. A theology of weakness eliminates the violent rhetoric some are inclined to adopt. She refutes Tim LaHaye's claim that she proposes a "wimpy Jesus." She answers, "The Jesus in Revelation is very powerful, but he conquers in a different way—not by killing people but by being killed, by giving his own life."⁷

Consummate exegetes, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, provide exegetical wisdom.⁸ They emphasize the character of literary forms in apocalyptic literature. They insist that the book be seen as a whole and not in segmented portions. "The book is a creatively structured whole, and each vision is an integral part of that whole."⁹

With this observation in mind, we are less likely to start dividing Revelation into parts that support theological fancies. This discipline is coupled with a strong attempt at

⁵ Barbara Rossing, "End Game: Living Joyfully in an Apocalyptic Time," *Christian Century*, November 11, 2006, 22-25.

⁶ Rossing, "End Game," 25.

⁷ Rossing, "End Game," 23.

⁸ Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 23.

⁹ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 259.

historical study hereby accentuating the need for a balanced, holistic approach to Revelation. Also, we see how the metaphor of the Lamb can be the anchoring metaphor for all other literary considerations. Imagination is given space for sanctified exercise. I say sanctified exercise because the four tools provide boundaries within which understanding is garnered and freedom of imagination is encouraged.

M. Eugene Boring is sensitive to the literary characteristics of apocalyptic literature. For example, he takes on C.H. Dodd whose interpretation of “Lamb” image, he says, is suspect. Apparently, says Boring, “Dodd concludes that the powerful ‘Lamb’ of Revelation is simply another version of the violent Messiah.”¹⁰

Boring sees a number of problems with this interpretation. Boring’s most cogent argument centers on some word studies. He discusses the difference between ἀρνίον (the diminutive for “lamb”) and ἀμνός, the word used most frequently in the New Testament for “lamb.” The -ίον ending depicts a victimized lamb whose sacrifice upon the altar is “at the opposite pole from the violent warrior Messiah of Apocalyptic expectation.”¹¹ This Lamb also conquers (νικάω). Says Boring, “As ‘Lamb’ is the key Christological noun in John’s vocabulary, so ‘conquer’... is the key Christological verb.”¹² Hereby, we see the effect this metaphor has on interpretation of Revelation.

Boring is not the only one who notices this interpretive key. Eugene H. Peterson also posits the Lamb as interpretive key in *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination*. There are two interpretive benchmarks according to

¹⁰ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), 110.

¹¹ Boring, *Revelation*, 110.

¹² Boring, *Revelation*, 111.

Peterson. Begin with Christ as the center, the one “revealed.” He sees interpretation beginning with Jesus the crucified and resurrected one. Then he continues with the church. For him, it is the ordinary, mundane, very human group of people Jesus decides to call his own. Hereby he gives a nod to a historical and theological understanding of the Asia Minor churches. “Each of the seven churches, and every church since, is defined by the living Christ.”¹³ With Boring,¹⁴ Peterson reveals Revelation as a liturgical phenomenon.¹⁵ The Lamb takes center stage as he appears from the center of the throne in Revelation 5. The Lamb is the central metaphor and gives definition to the rest of the book, according to Peterson. This conclusion aligns with my discussion of the first tool for exegesis in my thesis; embrace the central metaphor of the Lamb.¹⁶

Mitchell G. Reddish finds himself in dialogue with Boring and Peterson.¹⁷

Reddish is sensitive to historical criticism. He also emphasizes the literary genre called apocalyptic literature. “The purpose of apocalypses was to give comfort and hope to people who were overwhelmed, confused, frightened, and beleaguered. The intended readers often suffered from ‘cognitive dissonance,’ meaning their preconceived notions about the world and reality did not match the actual situation as they experienced it.”¹⁸

¹³ Eugene H. Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: John and the Praying Imagination* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1989), 46.

¹⁴ Boring, *Revelation*, 53.

¹⁵ Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 43.

¹⁶ Blount points to Jesus as “witness” (Revelation 1:5) as the foremost image, even before “lamb.” The “witness,” he says, “faithfully adhered to that testimony even under the direst of circumstances, at the cost of his own life,” 45. Blount’s emphasis is on what he calls a “cultural” approach to Revelation: “A cultural reading reveals the meaning of Revelation for those who share its contextual dynamics. ... (A) cultural reading reveals what Revelation means for us” (5).

¹⁷ Mitchell G. Reddish, *Apocalyptic Literature* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995).

¹⁸ Reddish, *Apocalyptic Literature*, 4.

Given the above statement by Reddish, we can sympathize with the misunderstandings of present audiences. According to my thesis, there is a need for a method of study of Revelation that enhances genre and Gosepl sensitivity. Modern North American audiences may need reminders regarding the social context that brought forth Revelation.

Peterson and Reddish also notice a unique temptation common to both the first century and the 21st century. Peterson compares the pagan shrines of Baal and the imperial shrines of Caesar with modern shopping malls.¹⁹ Reddish compares John's warnings to his church and the propensity to compromise with cultrual norms that encourage an overindulgent consumerism.²⁰

On the other hand, Adela Yarbro Collins disagrees with the above conclusions about the Lamb's role. Jamie Manson interviewed Collins.²¹ Collins is an expert on the historical research of Revelation. She disagrees with others' conclusions about the Lamb and its central place in the interpretation of the text. "Barbara Rossing, David Barr, and M. Eugene Boring want to say that the lamb is the controlling image, that the only way that Jesus conquers is through suffering and through his spoken word. In my view, that is reading too much against the grain for chapter 19."²²

Collins may be unwilling to use the Lamb metaphor as interpretive norm but she is quick to say that texts of Scripture, like Revelation 19, do not justify war or aggression.

¹⁹ Peterson, *Revelation*, 60.

²⁰ Reddish, *Apocalyptic Literature*, 10ff.

²¹ Jamie Manson, "Integrating Apocalypticism into Modern Theology," *Reflections* 92, no. 1, (Spring 2005).

²² Manson, "Integrating Apocalypticism," 14.

In spite of her disagreements with Rossing, et al, her conclusions about the message of the text lead me to conclude she is at least showing genre sensitivity, a major point of my thesis. Revelation “provides a grand, poetic finale to the Bible. ... It gives [us] a language to understand [our] suffering and to protest. ... But at the same time, it gives [us] a horizon of hope.”²³

The Lamb typifies a theology of weakness. The Christology and soteriology of Revelation are grounded in this metaphor of Jesus of Nazareth and his salvific work on the cross. Revelation accentuates this notion, especially in Revelation 4 and 5. However, God’s power is also revealed by these Revelation texts. The Lamb is the one who stands, that is, he is the resurrected one.

Why the Tools?

In the following section, I bring into conversation scholars whose work illustrates my thesis in exegetical detail, especially three of the four tools—embrace the Lamb, explore the Old Testament, and engage the eschatological key. These deep, nuanced conversations bring to the fore something that is often missing in these discussions by pastors and congregants, the literary context of the Book of Revelation.

Embrace the Lamb

The exegesis of Revelation 4 and 5 is a central concern of this project. Revelation 4 anticipates the unveiling of the Lamb in Revelation 5. But what of the power shown to John as he observes the throne of God? Closer exegetical examination of the text is in

²³ Manson, “Integrating Apocalypticism,” 15.

order so as to illustrate how these nuanced observations inform my thesis. By doing so, we will see how the notion of weakness continues to inform the readers' notion of power, the power of God.

Twenty-four elders surround the throne of God (Revelation 4:4). There is some question as to the identity of these elders. Robert H. Mounce thinks these beings are angelic.²⁴ Michael Wilcock disagrees.²⁵ Since the word "elder" (πρεσβύτερος) is used for church elders, human beings, John here must mean the Old Testament and New Testament saints. Though not triumphant in the ultimate sense, says Wilcock, "We learn from Ephesians 2:6 that 'in the heavenly places' (i.e. the level of spiritual reality) we ourselves, the church still militant here on earth, are already seated with Christ. John himself has hinted as much in [Revelation] 1:5, 6."²⁶

Wilcock is correct. The elders represent those under the sovereign rule of God. But, they also represent those who are servants of God. Those with genre sensitivity see that Revelation 4-5 lifts up God's servants in a way that is surprising and ironic. The notion of power and weakness is turned upside-down. The world sees God's servants as so much fodder for persecution and ridicule. God, on the other hand, sees God's servants as authoritative prophets who carry out the will of God. The Lamb is responsible for their salvation (Revelation 5:11, 12). We also learn God's servants follow the Lamb as "first

²⁴ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 121-122.

²⁵ Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Revelation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 61, 62.

²⁶ Wilcock, *The Message of Revelation*, 116.

fruits” (Revelation 14:4). Once again, and in accord with my thesis, we are reminded of the Lamb’s metaphorical influence in exegesis and interpretation of the Revelation text.

As important as the Lamb metaphor is to Revelation and its interpretation, the role of the Old Testament cannot be underestimated. The following discussion emphasizes this role thus giving further credence to the use of this tool in the study of the Book of Revelation.

Explore the Old Testament

Bodies of water have a unique symbolic significance in the Bible. The crystal sea of Revelation (4:6) hearkens back to the beginning of creation. It is God who creates order from the chaos of the waters in Genesis 1:1, 2. Noah escapes the chaos of the waters in Genesis 6:17, 18. Jesus stills the chaos of the storm in Mark 6:44ff. Revelation 4:6, however, gives the reader a different picture. There is no need to calm the sea. The sea is smooth as glass and crystal clear. It is eternally calm in spite of the rolling of thunder and the flashes of lightning that come from the throne of power (Revelation 4:5). Nothing can disturb it.

Boring compares the crystal sea to the Red Sea. If the Red Sea symbolizes chaos, “John sees the hostile threat to creation as no threat. It is in God’s presence—smooth as glass and under control.”²⁷ These powerful images will be important for understanding the irony of redemption. Genre sensitivity is also increased as students of Revelation begin to understand how the images glorify God. The notion of the power of chaos/evil appears to be nullified, or at least under control, by the power of God.

²⁷ Boring, *Revelation*, 105.

Boring mentions creation also because of what follows in Revelation 4:6b (γέμοντα ὀφθαλμῶν ἔμπροσθεν καὶ ὀπίσθεν). With their varied faces and “six wings” (ἔχων ἅνὰ πτέρυγας ἑξ), scholars debate about who or what these creatures are.²⁸ John borrows from Old Testament images in Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1. Therefore, it is probable that the creatures are angelic beings.

Notice that the eyes are mentioned again in Revelation 4:8 as being “all around and inside” (ἔσωθεν γέμουσιν ὀφθαλμῶν). This is important for John and his audience because he hereby conveys a sense of omniscience. But they are “living creatures,” that is, created beings. Nevertheless, these all-seeing, all-knowing angels are not only able to see, but see from the vantage point of the throne room of God. If God’s living creatures can see in this way, God’s vision is without parallel!²⁹

Imagination is required, says Mounce. “Here as elsewhere we are dealing with visions that were meant to stir the imagination, not yield to the drawing board.”³⁰ Thus, these creatures are representative of God in a very special way. Leonard Thompson says these creatures help delineate what he calls “literary boundaries.” He writes, “By paying attention to literary boundaries in the Book of Revelation, one learns about the structure of the seer’s book.”³¹ The six-winged, many-eyed angels are representative “hybrid” creatures whose existence is expected because they dwell with God, indeed next to God. But, since John envisions them as beings that are made up of animal, angel, and human

²⁸ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 124, 125.

²⁹ See Proverbs 15:3, “The eyes of the Lord are everywhere” (NIV).

³⁰ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 125.

³¹ Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990), 76.

parts, they also surprise the reader with their unreal quality. Thompson writes, “By transgressing those ordinary boundary distinctions, the seer creates awesome figures of divinity as well as of monstrous evil.”³²

Yet, as Revelation 4 anticipates Revelation 5, these creatures sing the eternal “Holy, Holy, Holy.” When the Lamb emerges from the center of the throne in Revelation 5, these “figures of divinity as well as of monstrous evil” will be part of the landscape of the unveiling of the Lamb. Again, true power lies with the crucified and risen Christ. The Lamb is the controlling metaphor. It is at this point we can engage the eschatological key to Revelation.

Engage the Eschatological Key

The crucified, resurrected, and exalted Christ is the one revealed in Revelation 5. This in itself is an engagement with the exalted Christ who was crucified and then raised from the dead. This tool is given credence through the following discussion of the literature cited below.

David E. Aune goes into great detail in order to accentuate the word choices John uses to create anticipation regarding the revelation of the resurrected Lamb in Revelation 5.³³ As I mention in Chapter Two of this project, verses 9 and 10 of Revelation 4 show us John’s creative use of words.

³² Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 77.

³³ David E. Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 52a, *Revelation 1-5* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1997).

As discussed in Chapter Two, John creates a tension with great anticipation with his use of the language in Revelation 4 and 5. The combination of adverb with future verb forms used by John reveals what Zerwick calls a Hebraism.³⁴ A snowball of praise is built with the word forms used by John.³⁵

Aune maintains this movement is not necessarily a repeated event. That is, the drama of the text along with the word choices sets readers up for a one-time event, the revelation of the Lamb. Aune continues with this notion,

The temporal adverb ὅταν, “when, whenever,” does not suggest repeated action but refers to a unique event as it does in 8:1; 10:7; 11:7; 12:4; 17:10; 20:7. ... *When* the cherubim give glory and honor and thanksgiving to God, *then* the twenty-four elders will worship God, cast their wreaths before the throne, and sing the (“Holy”) song (v. 10). This occurs *just once* [my emphasis] in this text unit (Rev. 4-5), namely in 5:13, 14, when all creation ascribes blessing and honor and glory and might to God; it is precisely then that the elders fall down to worship God.³⁶

Is John, with his word play, imaginatively showing his listeners the never-ending chorus of praise that snowballs exponentially toward the revelation of the Lamb? Or, does this section creatively anticipate a one-time event in Revelation 5? These questions are important because the Lamb of God appears in Revelation 5.

Aune admits to being puzzled with regard to the use of the future verbs in 4:9, 10. He writes, “These future tenses present a formidable interpretive puzzle. One solution is to regard them as representing Semitic past tenses. ... They simply cannot be ascribed to vividness; they must be attributed to the seer’s awareness that these events have not yet

³⁴ Maximilian Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the New Testament* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979), 750.

³⁵ See William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 592.

³⁶ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 307.

occurred.”³⁷ Again, Revelation 4 anticipates the unveiling of the Lamb in Revelation 5. The tension created by the text accentuates the revelation about to come.

Conclusion

In my thesis, I contend that the Lamb metaphor is the controlling image of the book. I come to this conclusion by virtue of normative exegetical practice. I present four tools to help students of Revelation approach the text with intelligence and imagination. As this chapter reveals, the scholarly work discussed above discerns the central place the metaphor of the Lamb has in the text of Revelation. While there may be varying degrees of disagreement, there is no question as to the Lamb’s place in interpretation.

In the next chapter, Project Design, I conduct a survey of the Hudson River Presbytery. This survey reveals a lack of exegetical training when it comes to interpreting Revelation. It reveals the need for a method of interpretations that is genre-sensitive. Therefore, I will create a study guide that introduces the four tools. I will make suggestions as to how to approach certain chapters of Revelation using the four tools.

Finally, Chapter Five, Outcomes, deals with the results of the project; specifically, how pastors and congregations benefit from a manual designed with the four tools in mind. I will include the critiques of HRP pastors who will evaluate the study guide and its usefulness. I will also list lessons learned from this project. I now turn to Chapter Four, Project Design.

³⁷ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 276.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN

Introduction

In this thesis-project, I introduce the problem of interpreting the Book of Revelation. The setting is the pastors of the Hudson River Presbytery (HRP). My thesis is that the preaching and teaching of the Book of Revelation can be done with confidence and joy for pastors in the HRP through normative exegetical practices while using God-given imagination prompted by the genre known as apocalyptic literature. In Chapter Two, I discuss theological and exegetical issues of interpreting Revelation. Then, in Chapter Three, I examine the literature that influenced my study of Revelation.

In this chapter, I describe the feed-forward and a feedback process I used to evaluate the product of my project thesis—a study guide for Revelation. The feed-forward process was used first in 2007 to survey the HRP pastors about their use of the text of Revelation. Their answers to my survey questions helped me discern their need for more training and knowledge of Revelation. I then constructed the study guide for their use. I thought the study guide would be of help to all of them. Though my interest was mainly in clergy, I hoped to encourage both clergy and lay to delve into the last book of the Bible with some confidence and knowledge.

After receiving the feed-forward results, I developed a feedback process using the study guide based on my thesis. After constructing the study guide, I asked ten pastors to review the guide. Six pastors responded. More will be said about that in Chapter Five.

Would a study guide based on my thesis be helpful for interpretive purposes? While helping clergy and lay folk to approach the texts of Revelation, I wondered if the guide would be helpful for sermon preparation for clergy. Though I received an answer about sermon preparation, I feel I could have been more mindful of that issue in constructing the survey questions. I could have, perhaps, added one or two more questions about sermon prep. Chapter Five will give more details about that question with the other outcomes of this project along with suggestions for future studies.

A Survey of Ministers in the Hudson River Presbytery

Feed-forward Process

First, I began with a feed-forward process. In order to test my hypothesis, I needed to discover to what extent HRP pastors use Revelation in preaching or Bible study. Therefore, I began with an introductory cover letter to HRP pastors describing my project (Appendix A). I told them I was interested in their opinions and practice of interpreting Revelation. As I say in the letter, I wanted to get a sense of PC (USA) ministers' use of the texts of Revelation. As a matter of context, I am aware that HRP ministers use the *Revised Common Lectionary*, which limits the number of Revelation texts available. I suspected the majority of answers would indicate occasional and Lectionary use. I believed these answers would be typical in that most respondents were leery of the Book of Revelation. But, would there be any interest in the last book of the Bible?

Second, I wanted to know to what extent they used Revelation in preaching and teaching. Therefore, I attached a ten-question survey to the introductory letter. This

survey covers the range of information I needed for my project. The questionnaire asks about Bible study use, seminary and divinity school training, the challenges of the text, personal preferences, and contemporary applications of the text (Appendix B). I had 72 of these letters and questionnaires. I mailed them to the pastors of HRP. Through this process, I gained a good sense of HRP pastors' use of the Revelation texts via the answers they gave me in the survey.

Third, I wanted to compare and contrast the answers I received. Therefore, my next step involved quantifying their answers on a spreadsheet (Appendix E). The questionnaire contains multiple-choice answers. I put the questions into ten columns and labeled them Question 1, Question 2, etc. Each cell of the spreadsheet contains specific answers to each question. Most answers given were according to the letter assigned to each one: a, b, c, d, and combinations of these. Questions 7 and 8 contained word answers because I asked about commentaries and chapters of Revelation that pique the most interest.

One important question for me was whether their seminary or divinity school helped prepare them for the study of Revelation. When it comes to teaching and preaching apocalyptic literature, how much has their seminary or divinity school education contributed to their knowledge of Revelation and apocalyptic literature in general? I suspected that beyond the typical "Intro" courses to Biblical literature, not many have taken courses specific to apocalyptic literature or an exegesis course in Revelation. I think pastors can use some help with the text of Revelation. An accessible instrument for studying Revelation will help minimize the lack of training shared by HRP pastors.

There is another reason a study guide is needed. I wanted to discover the extent of their interest. Were they eager to learn more about Revelation and how to approach its texts? Question 2 of my survey asks HRP pastors, “If you could, would you preach Revelation as a series in your church?” Those answers were revealing.

Since I wanted to create a study guide, I included Question 10, “My church would be interested in a Revelation study guide.” This question tested the quality of the guide and revealed their eagerness to be better equipped in their approach to Revelation.

I believe the feed-forward process indicated that a majority of responders expressed a qualified interest in the study guide. Therefore, I created a study guide highlighting the four tools detailed in Chapter Two (Appendix G).

The Study Guide

Convinced of the need for a study guide for HRP pastors, I assembled the study guide in a way that introduces its readers to a method of interpretation for the text of Revelation. The guide addresses five passages of Revelation: 1:1-6, 4:1-11, 5:1-14, 13:1-18, and 22:1-21. The passages I use for the guide are pivotal for understanding how the four tools are used to interpret the Revelation text. In other words, I introduced a hermeneutical method, used it on five different passages, and encouraged students of the text to use it on the other passages of Revelation.

Most significantly, I addressed what I think are the key passages, Revelation 4:1-11 and 5:1-14, where the metaphor of the Lamb is introduced in a powerful way by John the Revelator. Along with an introduction and conclusion for each passage, I used the

NRSV for each Bible text. Each text is provided in full along with open-ended questions for personal study and group discussion.

Feedback Process: Testing the Study Guide

After completing the study guide, I made copies for HRP colleagues. I asked ten pastors in the HRP to perform a critique of the study guide (Appendix F). I quantified the results and reported on how the guide worked well and where it failed, according to the feedback forms I received from the respondents. I refer to the respondents as R1, R2, etc. The questions they responded to are referred to as Q1, Q2, etc. Each question is looked at through the lens of the table in Appendix I, one question at a time.

Q1: Is the text of the guide readable and understandable?

Q2: Is the concept of the “four tools” articulated well? If not, why not?

Q3: What can be added or subtracted from the guide in terms of the instructions?

Q4: What is the main point or big idea of the study guide? Is it communicated well?

Q5: Will the lay people in your church find the guide to be user-friendly? Why or why not?

Q6: Would you use this guide in your church for Bible study?

Q7: What in the guide was most helpful to you as a pastor? Least helpful?

I wanted to know what was helpful and what was not helpful in the study guide. This idea includes whether or not the guide helped them in their exegesis of Revelation for preaching.

Q8: Would you recommend the study guide to others?

The answers to these questions were helpful as a critique of the study guide.

Was the study guide for Revelation well received by the pastors who responded to my survey? Did they understand the heart of the project and what it is I was trying to accomplish, namely, *The preaching and teaching of the Book of Revelation can be done with confidence and joy for pastors in the HRP through normative exegetical practices while using God-given imagination prompted by the genre known as apocalyptic literature?*

Conclusion

This chapter uses survey tools in feed-forward form to determine the need for a study guide. Suspecting that there is a need for such a guide, I constructed one and included it with a survey form critiquing the study guide in feedback form. The feedback instrument was used to determine the effectiveness of a study guide constructed according to the thesis-project parameters of hermeneutics and exegesis developed in this project. Chapter Five will summarize the findings of my thesis, the lessons learned, and suggestions for further study.

CHAPTER FIVE

OUTCOMES

Introduction

In Chapter One of this thesis-project, I introduce the problem of interpreting the Book of Revelation within the setting of the Hudson River Presbytery (HRP) and its pastors. My thesis is that the preaching and teaching of the Book of Revelation can be done with confidence and joy for pastors in the HRP through normative exegetical practices while using God-given imagination prompted by the genre known as apocalyptic literature.

In Chapter Two, I show how four tools of exegesis can be used by these pastors to highlight the Gospel in Revelation through normative exegetical practices. I maintain that these practices involve both art and science. The art and science of Biblical interpretation is put to the test in a study of Revelation, the New Testament's foremost example of apocalyptic literature. Therefore, I also highlight the need for genre sensitivity. Apocalyptic literature is a genre that requires some knowledge and historical perspective of its origins, function, and form.

The literature review in Chapter Three highlights the work of scholars and exegetes who influence this project. In Chapter Four, I describe feed-forward and feedback instruments I used to test my thesis. The feed-forward instrument allowed me to assess HRP pastors' use of Revelation in their parishes. Among other things, the pastors showed a desire to be more proficient in their approach to Revelation. I say this because of the information I gathered from the survey results.

In this final chapter, I look at the feed-forward results that initiated the Revelation study guide. I then examine the feedback forms and quantify the results from the pastors who responded with critiques of the study guide. After discussing the feedback results, I provide my own critique followed by personal and professional lessons learned.

Feed-forward Survey of HRP Pastors

In general, though the answers (Appendix E) to the survey (Appendix D) indicate a neglect of the text of Revelation, nevertheless, the HRP pastors express a desire to know the text better as will be shown below.

One important question for me was whether their seminary or divinity school helped prepare them for the study and preaching of Revelation. I asked them what training, if any, they received in their seminary or divinity school education. Fifteen out of the 34 pastors said they were “somewhat” prepared by their seminary/divinity school education. Only nine said they were “well prepared.” Three pastors confessed to not having any courses in apocalyptic literature. Eight said they were prepared “hardly at all.” Therefore, we can conclude that pastors can use some help with the text of Revelation. An accessible instrument for studying Revelation will help minimize the lack of training shared by HRP pastors.

There is another reason a study guide is needed. Among the pastors, there is an interest, one could say an eagerness, to teach and preach from Revelation. Question two of my survey asks HRP pastors, “If you could, would you preach Revelation as a series in your church?” Twenty-five pastors answer “yes.” Other answers include “I might,”

“perhaps,” and “maybe.” One pastor says “no” because Revelation is “incomprehensible and dull” though this pastor did say he’d hire a professor to help teach Revelation.

Given the above statistics, HRP pastors do neglect Revelation because of a lack of training but, nevertheless, show an interest in studying this book. Based on the mix of answers mentioned above, a major aspect of this project was to create a study guide that affirms the thesis of this project.

Question 10 states, “My church would be interested in a Revelation study guide.” The choices are a. “Yes,” b. “No,” and c. “Maybe, I would have to preview it first.” There was only one negative answer with regard to the study guide. In fact, this person answered in the negative on most of the questions.

This feed-forward process indicates that a majority of responders expressed qualified interest in the study guide. Based on those affirmative answers, I developed a study guide highlighting the four tools detailed in Chapter Two (Appendix G).

Feedback: Testing the Study Guide

After completing the study guide, I made 10 copies for HRP colleagues. I asked them to perform a critique (Appendix H) of the study guide. Perhaps I should have contacted another 72 pastors for the feedback follow-up even though there has been a significant turnover in positions since 2007 when I initiated the original survey. Unfortunately, a lot of time passed between surveys. Therefore, I endeavored to pick 10 pastors in 2016 as a representative number whereby a good cross section of HRP pastors

would be represented. A conscious effort was made to include small church pastors with some of the bigger church pastors.¹

I do not think the smaller sample in the feedback process misrepresents what the larger sample in the feed-forward process indicated. However, a better sample would have been provided if all 10 pastors had responded. As it is, only six responded to the 2016 survey. Providentially, those six pastors proved to be very informative when it came to evaluating the study guide. They faithfully represented an interesting cross section of resident pastors in the HRP. Therefore, I am confident that their critique faithfully represents the HRP.

I quantified the results and reported on how the guide worked well and where it failed, according to the feedback forms I received from the respondents (Appendix I). I refer to the respondents as R1, R2, etc. The questions they respond to are referred to as Q1, Q2, etc. I will look at each question one at a time. I will include my own comments as I go through each question.

Q1: Is the text of the guide readable and understandable?

Q1.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, for the most part. You may want to explain “literary genre” better.
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The good news is that all six respondents found the guide to be readable and understandable. The only caveat comes from R6 who said the concept of literary genre needed more explanation. This becomes an important issue in other responses as will be

¹ The largest church represented has a membership of 500. The smallest church represented has a membership of 20. The rest range in between those two numbers.

shown below, especially since understanding literary genre is an important part of my project.

Q2: Is the concept of the “four tools” articulated well? If not, why not?

Q2	Yes	Yes	Yes. But it does presuppose some basic biblical literacy and literary knowledge. Also, use of additional sources could be encouraged in understanding historical context.	Second tool, especially for lay leaders, how do we discover the historical context? Resources? Fourth tool—Too deep for others, may minimize the depth of a theology of the cross.	Yes. But more explanation about how OT can be helpful and more context for the 7 churches addressed by John.	Need better explanation of “historical context.”
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R1 and R2 give an unqualified “yes” to the question. R3 notes the need for “some basic biblical literacy and literary knowledge” on the part of students. R3’s observation includes the suggestion that resources for understanding historical context be included in the discussion of the tools. I am taking note of this because it comes up again.

R4, 5, and 6 all mention the same need for better understanding of historical context. Historical context is further itemized under two rubrics: Old Testament contexts and the context of the Seven Churches of Revelation. That is, how can we better understand the Old Testament’s role in the writing of Revelation and how can we better understand the context of those specific churches in Asia Minor addressed by John?—good questions that should be addressed in a future version of the study guide. In that regard, R3 and 4 would like to see a list of references or resources that would be relevant to historical context.

R4 thinks the fourth tool, engage Revelation’s eschatological key—the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ—is “too deep for others, may minimize the depth of a theology of the cross.” I am not sure what R4 means by “minimize the depth of

a theology of the cross.” Yet, I think we cannot go “too deep” when it comes to a theology of the cross. Be that as it may, if we are going to look at the Lamb-as-metaphor, we will be going deep, deep into Scriptural images of sacrifice and redemption. These, I believe are at the core of what Revelation reveals. Therefore, R4 may need to rethink the concept of Christ and his cross before R4 delves into Revelation’s theology of the cross.

Q3: What can be added or subtracted from the guide in terms of the instructions?

Q3	Add a few more pondering questions, remove a few one word answers	[Left Blank]	Depends on the group, explain literary genre and why it matters, suggest more resources	Introduction helped focus on key issues in the scripture.	See Q2.	“No suggestions.”
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R2 and 6 had no suggestions with regard to adding or subtracting from the guide. R1 wanted a “few more pondering questions” and fewer one-word answers. R3 brought up a theme that seems to be pervading the survey answers—“explain literary genre,” why genre matters, and add more resources for further study. R5 added a similar statement by stressing the need for Old Testament and historical context. It is becoming obvious that historical context and literary genre need more explanation. Again, this could be a glaring weakness in the guide as understanding context and genre are of major importance in my project.

Q4: What is the main point or big idea of the study guide? Is it communicated well?

Q4	Genre sensitivity	Revelation is based on the Gospels and image of Christ as a sacrificial lamb.	Jesus is the Lamb of God who died, was raised, and is central to understanding	“If we study Revelation as apocalyptic literature as opposed to reading it literally, we can begin to understand Revelation.” Less doom and gloom but more hopeful given the presence of Christ and the Gospel.	Folks need not be afraid of the text but understand its richness as part of the Gospel.	To encourage reading and use of Revelation. A good job communicating it.
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The question about communicating the big idea or the main point well is my biggest concern. Ironically, R1 used two words to describe the main point—genre sensitivity. I take solace in that answer especially as I peruse the others’ answers. The fact is, I find the answers to Q4 to be uplifting as they communicate the theological heart and soul of the project!

Q5: Will the lay people in your church find the guide user-friendly? Why or why not?

Q5	Yes, concise, accessible, interesting, something they wonder about	Yes. It is fairly accessible, rarely uses academic terms or phrasing	Not sure, instructions are clear, questions are open-ended enough. Basic OT knowledge is needed.	It is user-friendly. Wording is high school level and understandable for most church members.	Most would though some will want more [historical] context.	People may still be intimidated and will need support of study leader.
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User-friendliness is important. R3 mentions Old Testament knowledge and R5 mentions historical context as educational needs. However, they also state that the instructions are clear and the questions are open-ended enough. R1, 2, and 4 all commend the guide with words like “concise, accessible, and interesting.” The respondents also appreciated the down-to-earth language used—“Rarely uses academic terms” and wording “is understandable for most church members.”

R6, however, notes the importance of a good study *leader* as people may still be intimidated by the text. Bible studies need the skills of good leadership no matter what Biblical text is under examination. User accessibility is important. But guidance from a good Bible study leader who possesses joyful confidence in the tools provided by the study guide will lead others into an enjoyable encounter with the text of Revelation.

Q6: Would you use this guide in your church for Bible study?

Q6	Yes	Yes	See Q5	Yes	Yes	Yes, may help us to avoid the study of Revelation.
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The answer from all respondents is “Yes” except for R3 who refers to Q5 where R3 mentions basic Old Testament knowledge. Once again, the lack of basic knowledge of Scripture is mentioned as a problem that will inhibit the study of Revelation.

A study guide for Revelation should give a list of references for further study. But I would hope all pastors are using a balance of Old Testament and New Testament texts in preaching and teaching with their congregations. One course on Revelation cannot be a test for success or failure of a church’s Biblical literacy. However, it may one important indicator.

Q7: What in the guide was most helpful to you as a pastor? Least helpful?

Q7	I liked that it was all there (including the scripture texts)	The 4 tools are useful.	Central metaphor puts the book into focus regarding gospel message. Too short for an in-depth study	It will help with sermon prep. Least helpful? —you only looked at 5 of the 22 chapters. Question 4 of chapter 4 is not open-ended but should be.	Most helpful how short explanations go with each text to help the reader move along from each Scripture.	The questions are helpful. (No comment on least helpful)
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R4 gives the most detailed answer but begins with, “It will help with sermon prep.” This is the only mention of sermon prep! I find here that I should have worded the question in a way that was more inclusive of sermon prep. After all, the idea is not just Bible study, but includes a way to approach the texts of Revelation for sermon preparation. I have more to say about sermon prep below.

Q8: Would you recommend the study guide to others?

Q8	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
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All respondents say they would recommend the study guide to others with an unqualified “Yes.” Naturally I am delighted with their answers. But I do need to make some more detailed comments in response. I do that below.

My Response to the Study Guide Survey

Overall, the study guide for Revelation was well received by the six pastors who responded to my survey. They understand the heart of the project and what it is I am trying to accomplish—*The preaching and teaching of the Book of Revelation can be done with confidence and joy for pastors in the HRP through normative exegetical practices while using God-given imagination prompted by the genre known as apocalyptic literature*. The study guide, nevertheless, has some weak spots. The guide needs to:

- Provide more information about historical context, e.g., the seven churches of Asia Minor.
- Provide more information about the Old Testament’s role in Revelation.
- Provide other resources for study of context and the Old Testament.

- Provide a “how to” section for understanding historical context and Old Testament in Revelation.
- Provide a better explanation for the important issue of genre sensitivity, especially as it applies to the genre of apocalyptic literature. I am reminded of something Michael Gorman says in the prelude to his book, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*: “This book is not a detailed commentary. It is rather a guide to reading Revelation in a responsible way and a theological engagement with the text.”² Likewise, if this study guide helps others to be responsible readers who are willing to think with theological acumen about Revelation, the guide has done its job. This is the goal of increasing genre sensitivity. This is a key to studying Revelation with joy and confidence.
- I would also include more conversation about a theology of the cross. Though only one respondent had an issue with that idea, it should not go unnoticed for further study. This idea applies to Chapter Two of this project as well, especially as it applies to a “theology of weakness.” Endemic to the Gospel message, such a theology lies at the center of Revelation. To me, Jesus-as-Lamb seems a pretty clear message about the ironic power of God. However, it can be a stumbling block and foolishness, depending on the audience.³ Therefore, a more incisive discussion is needed in the study guide; one that brings in other metaphors and images of Jesus that complement the image of

² Michael J. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), xi.

³ 1 Corinthians 1:23.

the Lamb.⁴ As Gorman suggests, the message of the Gospel comes shining through. “Revelation is therefore also about being true to God and heeding the Spirit by following Jesus.”⁵

- With regard to sermon preparation, I did not address that discipline as directly as I could have. As the project proceeded, I found myself more concerned with how a pastor *and* a class of students would interact with the text. I may have been presumptuous about the pastor in the study preparing a sermon.
- Yet, the pastor in the classroom is not that far removed from the pastor in the study, especially when it comes to utilizing the four tools for exegetical work. Therefore, I believe the pastor can use the study guide for sermon prep. The exegetical method I describe using the four tools will certainly be useful to the pastor as he/she opens the text of Revelation for sermon prep purposes.

There is obviously more fine-tuning that needs to be done, but I am encouraged by the results of the study guide survey.

The Problem Addressed

I must attend to the specifics of the problem laid out in Chapter One regarding HRP pastors and their congregations.

- *Neglect of Revelation* can be addressed by both pastors and congregants through a study using the study guide provided by this project. While a pastor

⁴ See Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, xv, where he lists “Faithful Witness,” “Present One,” and “Coming One” as linked with the Lamb.

⁵ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, xv.

is free to preach as he/she pleases, both pastor and class can benefit from the guide thus eliminating neglect.

- *Lack of training* can be dealt with easily enough through further course work, at least by pastors. Perhaps the study guide may light a fire under some who feel that need. Presbytery meetings can be used as a place for some informal training. The HRP often uses breakout groups for discussion of subjects and continuing education. Meanwhile, congregants can be introduced to some basics via the study guide. Hereby they may find themselves getting curious and hungry for more.
- *Exploitive literature* may always be a problem. But the enlightened pastor and congregant are the best weapons against such suspect theology and Bible manipulation. Responsible and respectful approaches to Scripture make for a responsible and respectful learning curve for everyone.
- *Uncovering the Gospel* in Revelation is the ultimate bonus. Gospel means “good news” or “announcement” (εὐαγγέλιον).⁶ The verbal form means “announcing the good news” (εὐαγγελίζω).⁷ In New Testament terms, the good news centers on the person of Jesus Christ. He is not only the messenger, he is the Message. As we approach the good news of Revelation, the announcement of God’s control of the world and God’s eventual overcoming of all that is contrary to God’s good news is anticipated by creation and the

⁶ W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell Publishers, 1966), s.v. “εὐαγγέλιον.”

⁷ Vine, *Expository Dictionary*, s.v. “εὐαγγελίζω.”

Church.⁸ Revelation helps us look “behind the curtain”⁹ and see how this looks from John the Revelator’s point of view. We wonder at his tears in Revelation 5:4! But we also rejoice with all of heaven as the Lamb is introduced and takes the scroll in Revelation 5:7. Finally, it is the Lamb who is exalted for his work upon the cross and it is he who has “made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:10; NKJV). That is the Gospel truth!

Personal Lessons Learned

I begin with the process itself. I had no idea how difficult this project would be when I started. My writing skills have been challenged, found wanting, and sharpened. My ability to focus was called into question. I felt tested on all academic and spiritual levels as I struggled to get this project finished. I continue to question my intellectual prowess, especially when it comes to writing a coherent paragraph. But, having been tested and tried this way, I’ve discovered the mercy and grace of God. I would have given up a long time ago except for God and the communities of which I am a member; Denton Presbyterian Church, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and my family and friends. Their encouragement was and is vital.

I also learned a lot about my colleagues in ministry. Hudson River Presbytery is filled with men and women who love God. They’ve been trained at Princeton Seminary,

⁸ Romans 8:19.

⁹ Fred B. Craddock, “Preaching the Book of Revelation,” *Interpretation*, 40, no. 3, (1986), 275, quoted in Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety*, 191.

Yale Divinity School, Union Seminary, Gordon-Conwell, Alliance Seminary, and other places of graduate training for ministers of the Gospel. However, I admit to being surprised at their lack of familiarity with Revelation and apocalyptic literature in general. I hope I've made a difference for them by executing this project.

Finally, I learned a lot about my own exegetical skills. I am a trained exegete thanks to Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and other places in which I've had the privilege of studying. I've been blessed with colleagues who have a zeal for the Word. But this project stretched my faith and caused me to dig deeper than ever when it comes to wrestling with Biblical texts. For that, I am grateful.

Professional Lessons Learned

Exegesis has a way of humbling a person before the Scriptures. The nuances of meaning that exegetical work uncovers call for discernment skills that come with study and practice. In the study and practice of exegesis, I've also learned I am a member of a community of scholars. I need the insights of others to help me think and write. Therefore, I find myself consulting commentaries out of necessity as the Word takes on deeper meaning and application. I believe I am a better exegete because of my membership in this community.

So, for all the academic disciplines needed, there is also the need for reflection. I can have my desk piled high with commentaries and notes. But if I am not reflecting on the text and making personal application from the heart, my work will lack the necessary fire of conviction. As one professor writes, "The necessity of starting with ourselves places a rigorous demand on the spiritual life of the minister, and no shortcut will serve.

Only by Bible study, prayer, and meditation can our own hearts be magnetized to the lodestone, which is God himself.”¹⁰

Thus, theological acumen has been tested, too. It is not enough to know the origin of a word and its variants if one cannot think through an issue with theological alertness. As I state in Chapter Two of this project, a hermeneutic of respect initiates the project of thinking theologically with the text. Thus, my perspective begins with a God who is bigger than I. Yet, this God also wishes to reveal God’s own self to me in Christ. Articulating such truths theologically is not an easy task.

The Book of Revelation is all about theology. Theology leads to thoughts about other disciplines. That is, the Word has something to say to the world, its systems, and its people:

The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;
for he founded it on the seas
and established it on the waters. (Psalm 24:1, 2; NIV)

Therefore, Revelation is also about liturgy, ecology, politics, and ethics, among other things. And, if Revelation is an “unveiling,” then Revelation not only unveils Jesus Christ, it unveils the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That means the Gospel is a universe-wide phenomenon that affects all areas of life including liturgy, ecology, politics, and ethics. In other words, Jesus has something to say about human life, all of human life. Sounding a lot like the angel in Revelation 14:6, 7,¹¹ Jesus proclaimed his own apocalyptic message,

¹⁰ Jeffrey D. Arthurs, *Preaching As Reminding: Stirring Memory in an Age of Forgetfulness* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2017), 116.

¹¹ “And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, ‘Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters’” (NRSV).

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15; NRSV).

I made reference to respectful and responsible reading of Scripture as a solution to the problem of interpreting Revelation in Chapter One. I chronicled the negative aspects of misreading Revelation by those with exploitive motives. I also wanted to make a case for joy and confidence for the pastors of the HRP and their congregations. Gorman puts it this way, “Revelation is about being true to God and heeding the Spirit by following Jesus, specifically in

- faithful witness and resistance;
- attentive listening;
- liturgical (worship-infused) living; and
- missional hope.”¹²

All these positive aspects make for a healthy respect of Scripture.¹³ These positive aspects also make for a healthier church; a church that is free to read and enjoy Revelation with knowledge and insight. A respectful and responsible reading of Revelation will increase joy in its readers/listeners. Joyful Christians can change the world!

But, I’ve also learned Revelation is about an unseen world of principalities and powers. God is at work there, too, according to Ephesians 3:10, 11: “His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he

¹² Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, xv.

¹³ The bulleted categories would also suggest other lenses through which we could study Revelation.

accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord” (NIV). Thus, we find the church and its mission as a subject of Revelation 2 and 3. What does the Lamb require of the Church? Does Revelation help the Church address the evil and perplexities of the world?

Revelation tells us something about the world and the powers in the world—what we do not see is always more than we can imagine. War may be on the horizon.

Oppression of “the least of these” may be increasing. Racism, bigotry, and misogyny may be on the ascent as public policy. However, Revelation takes these powers into account and tells us they are of no account. That is, though many may be threatened and even fatally injured by them, they do not have the last word. The Lamb who was slaughtered but stands has the last word. The powers that defy God will be dealt with in God’s time. Our job is to remember that our battle is not against each other but against these powers.¹⁴ Arming ourselves with the Lamb’s weapons is the wisest way to deal with the world and its powers.

As John testifies, this is no easy task.¹⁵ Revelation may say some things that disturb us. Admittedly, many of the Scriptures can appear odd or weird. However, as John Wesley said, “The Revelation was not written without tears; neither without tears will it be understood.”¹⁶ There is much to learn!

¹⁴ Ephesians 6:10-17.

¹⁵ Revelation 1:9.

¹⁶ John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, on Rev 5:4, quoted in Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, xvii. The full quote is “A weeping which sprung from greatness of mind. The tenderness of heart which he always had appeared more clearly now he was out of his own power. The Revelation was not written without tears; neither without tears will it be understood. How far are they from the temper of St. John who inquire after anything rather than the contents of this book! yea, who applaud their own clemency if they excuse those that do inquire into them!” Found at John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, Christianity.com, Revelation 5 Bible Commentary, Accessed March 5, 2018. <https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=wes&b=66&c=5>.

I am learning to lovingly embrace the oddness and weirdness of Scripture. Revelation may be the prime example of this oddness in the New Testament. All the metaphors, images, and various forms of literature and rhetoric that make up apocalyptic literature testify to its oddness. Nevertheless, “How blessed the reader! How blessed the hearers and keepers of these oracle words, all the words written in this book! The time is just about up!” (Revelation 1:3; MSG)

If we preachers ever feel the fire resident in the words of John the Revelator and the Apocalypse he faithfully proclaims, we may find ourselves on the leading edge of revival. That would be my prayer for all preachers of the Gospel, especially the preachers and pastors of the Hudson River Presbytery!

Finally, given Scripture’s penchant for oddness and Revelation’s propensity for weirdness, I’ve learned the importance of genre sensitivity. Though I make the case in my project on Revelation, genre sensitivity has become an important tool in my approach to other Scriptures as well. The Bible is multiform and multiplex when it comes to the genres it includes. This is a wonderful gift to all who read the Bible with joy, imagination, and understanding.

An Open Book for All

There are other methods of research that require imagination and vision when it comes to Revelation. Gorman suggests four possible paths above. I will attend to one of those below. Therefore, I suggest three that I find relevant and interesting because of their musical, liturgical, and communal trajectories.

I think of Brian Blount's use of African-American culture as a lens through which Revelation can be interpreted.¹⁷ Blount uses music to explain how much of the hymnody in Revelation is reflected in what he calls the "spiritual-blues impulse" of black music.¹⁸ This approach also makes room for the Arts as a lens through which we can look at Revelation.¹⁹

But Blount makes a profoundly graphic statement about interpreting Revelation. Sounding a bit like Marva Dawn, Blount writes, "Weakness is the silver bullet that God fires out like a deadeye marksman against the scarcely exposed heart of cosmic and human evil. For John, weakness is a weapon. Jesus deployed it at the cross; Jesus' followers must now trigger it with their lives."²⁰ A theology of weakness seems ever prevalent!

Another emphasis is presented by Eugene Peterson that coordinates with Gorman's emphasis on liturgy or what he calls "worship-infused" living.²¹ While focusing on the Lamb, Peterson's approach includes seeing Revelation through the lens of a worship service, liturgy, and community. He writes,

It is assumed that the Revelation will be read and heard in church. That individuals will take the scroll and go off to read it in the privacy of their own rooms is not for a moment imagined. Attention to the Gospel message is always

¹⁷ Brian K. Blount, *Can I Get A Witness?: Reading Revelation Through African American Culture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

¹⁸ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness?*, 91ff.

¹⁹ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, 4-6, talks about music and the arts.

²⁰ Blount, *Can I Get a Witness?*, 70.

²¹ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, xv.

an act of the community, never a message in private. A believing community is the context for a life faith.²²

Furthermore,

The Church at worship and gathered at God's throne, receiving the revelation of the preached and preaching Christ, singing the great hymns, affirming and being affirmed. Details of the vision will be reintroduced as St. John's vision develops. This is the reality we participate in in every act of worship, which shapes both our lives and our history.²³

So, whether we use a cultural lens, a liturgical lens, or the lens of Christian community, the fact is, Revelation is a book rich with opportunities for growth in the faith. We may have to discern the best path forward and the best lens with which to interpret the text. But the way forward will prove challenging and fun. "Worthy is the Lamb!"

Conclusion

This might be the oddest thing of all. If I had this project to do over again, I would do it over again. I'd make it leaner and more focused. I would begin the process the first day of the Doctor of Ministry class. While making sure all other assignments were completed with perspicuity and on time, I would also be sure to work on the thesis-project too, as time allowed. As a "slow learner" and, apparently, "late bloomer," I've learned what kind of student I am.

I am reminded of Jesus' words to his beloved disciples, the "slow of heart," who had trouble grasping his words, even after he explained them so many times (Luke

²² Eugene H. Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1989), 43.

²³ Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 70.

24:25). When I think of how much trouble I had grasping what I needed to do to complete this project, I realize I am in good company.

I am happy to contribute what I've learned about Revelation to my colleagues in the Hudson River Presbytery. I've found great pleasure in sharing the insights I've received while digging around in the rich soil of John's Apocalypse. May we all have our eyes opened to God's wonderful gift of the Scriptures. May we especially be open to the gift of God's son, the Lamb who was slain, but stands.

APPENDIX A¹

AN OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

- I. Introduction: Origin of A Servant Vision (1:1-8)
 - a. Ἀποκάλυψις of Jesus Christ by his angels to his servants (τοῖς δούλοις)
 - b. Received by John, servant of Christ (τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ)
 - c. Given to the seven churches in Asia, servants of Christ (τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ)
- II. The Servant's Vision (1:9-20)
 - a. In the Spirit on the Lord's day (ἐν πνεύματι ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ)
 - b. The Lord/Son of Man among the lampstands
 - c. The command: "Now write ..." (γράφον οὖν)
 - d. A mystery revealed (τὸ μυστήριον): Son of Man = Lord of Churches
- III. Words to the Wise (2:1-3:22)
 - a. "These are the words ..." (Τὰδε λέγε) (vs. 2:2, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14)
 - b. Located geographically: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea
 - c. Defined theologically: Christ among the lampstands
 - d. Specificity of direction, "I know ..." (Οἶδα)
- IV. A Heavenly Journey (4:1-6:11)
 - a. A call to worship: "Come up here ..." (Ἀνάβα ὧδε)
 - i. Perfect/complete beauty—"one seated on the throne (ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος) who looks like jasper and carnelian" (ὅμοιος ὁράσει λίθῳ ἰάσπιδι καὶ σαρδίῳ) (4:3)
 - ii. Perfect/complete authority—twenty-four thrones with twenty-four elders with white robes and gold crowns (4:4)
 - iii. Perfect/complete power—lightening, thunder, and the "seven spirits of God (τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ) (4:5)
 - iv. Perfect/complete purity—the sea of glass that is "like crystal" (ὅμοία κρυστάλλῳ) (4:6)
 - v. Perfect/complete response—the four creatures sing "Holy, holy, holy ..." (Ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος) (4:8)
 - vi. Perfect/complete timing—"Whenever (καὶ ὅταν) the creatures do this, "day and night without ceasing" (Οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς), the twenty-four worship and sing, "You are worthy ..." (Ἄξιός εἰ) (4:10, 11)
 - b. Another call to worship and a cause: "Who is worthy to open the scroll?" (Τίς ἄξιός ἀνοῖξαι τὸ βιβλίον) (5:1, 2)
 - i. No one (οὐδεὶς), at first, is a cause for sorrow (5:3, 4)

¹ All Greek texts are from Kurt Aland et al., eds. *Novum Testamentum Graece (BNT)*, 27th ed., BibleWorks. v.8 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2001).

- ii. The Lamb who is the Lion who is the Root, whose beauty, authority, power, and purity are magnified by the heavenly worship—"You are worthy" (ἄξιός ἐστι) (5:5-10)
 - iii. The perfect response with perfect timing magnifies the "Lamb that was slaughtered" (ἄξιόν ἐστιν τὸ ἀρνίον τὸ ἐσφαγμένον) (5:11, 12)
 - iv. The perfect ending: the climactic "Amen!" produces prostrate elders (προσεκύνησαν) (5:13, 14)
 - c. The cause point above says it includes a "cause." Is this a different cause? the seven-sealed scroll and what it produced (6:1-11)
 - i. The first seal—a crowned archer on a white horse (1, 2)
 - ii. The second seal—an armed warrior on a red horse (3, 4)
 - iii. The third seal—a merchant on a black horse (5, 6)
 - iv. The fourth seal—death takes no holiday on a pale horse (7, 8)
 - v. The fifth seal—martyred souls cry for justice (9-11)
- V. The Sixth Seal—In the Mean Time, A Look (Καὶ εἶδον) At Mother Earth (6:12-7:8)
 - a. Nature reacts to revelation/wrath of the Lamb (6:12-14)
 - i. Earthquakes
 - ii. Sunless
 - iii. Blood moon
 - iv. Falling stars
 - v. Vanishing sky
 - b. Humankind reacts to the revelation/wrath of the Lamb (6:15-17) complete sentences like this are much clearer to the reader than fragments. Complete sentences convey ideas, but the reader has to guess what a fragment means.
 - i. Hide and seek like this. Don't know what this means.
 - ii. No place to hide
 - iii. Standing room only—"Who is able to stand?" (τίς δύναται σταθῆναι)
 - c. Four angels on four corners plus one (7:1-8) same. I won't mark more.
 - i. Marking the servants of God (τοὺς δούλους τοῦ θεοῦ) (3)
 - ii. Like the Lamb, perfection in number—144,000 (ἐκατὸν τεσσαράκοντα τέσσαρες χιλιάδες) (4)
 - iii. The perfect choice, Israel chosen in perfection (12 x 12)
- VI. Back to the Throne and the Lamb (7:9-17)
 - a. Those who worship are a "great multitude" (ὄχλος πολὺς) of humans (παντὸς ἔθνους καὶ φυλῶν καὶ λαῶν καὶ γλωσσῶν) (9)
 - b. A rhetorical question?—"Who are these? Where do they come from?" (13)
 - c. A hymn of salvation (15-17)
- VII. The Seventh Seal and the Seven Trumpets (8:1-11:19)
 - a. Quiet! For half an hour (8:1)
 - b. Seven angels with seven trumpets (8:2)
 - c. The prayers of the saints rise to God and explode on the earth (8:3-5)
 - d. Six angels blow six trumpets: Uncreation? (8:6-9:21)

- i. One third of the earth is burned
 - ii. One third of marine life is destroyed
 - iii. One third of fresh water is “made bitter” (ἐπικράνθησαν) (8:11)
 - iv. One third of natural light is extinguished followed by a triple woe (οὐαὶ οὐαὶ οὐαὶ) (8:13)
 - v. Woe number one: Invasion of the long-haired stinging scorpions (9:1-12)
 - vi. Woe number two: Release of the four angels, a third of humankind dies (9:13-19)
- VIII. Interlude or Prelude? (9:20-11:14)
 - a. Humankind does not repent (9:20, 21)
 - b. “Another mighty angel” (ἄλλον ἄγγελον ἰσχυρὸν) descends to earth and shouts; the reply remains hidden (μὴ αὐτὰ γράψῃς) (10:1-4)
 - c. Eating the scroll means participating in the battle (δεῖ σε πάλιν προφητεῦσαι) (10:11) until “the mystery of God will be fulfilled” (ἐτελέσθῃ) (10:7)
 - d. The two witnesses give testimony/prophecy for God (τοῖς δυσὶν μάρτυσίν μου), are killed, and rise again (11:3-13)
- IX. The Seventh Trumpet/The Third Woe/The Seven Bowls (11:15-16:21)
 - a. Thanksgiving for the Reign of God (εὐχαριστοῦμέν σοι, κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ) (11:15-19)
 - b. The primal battle: The Dragon vs. Michael (12:1-18)
 - i. Israel/Church under siege (12:1-6)
 - ii. War in heaven (Καὶ ἐγένετο πόλεμος ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ) (7)
 - iii. A hymn of praise and woe (12:10-12)
 - iv. An angry Dragon (ὠργίσθη ὁ δράκων) does not give up (17)
 - c. Two Beasts and the call for endurance (13:1-18)
 - i. Beast from the sea exercises power over the world
 - ii. Beast from the earth exalts sea beast
 - iii. Both are empowered by Dragon (ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ δράκων τὴν δύναμιν αὐτοῦ) (2)
 - d. Exaltation of the Lamb and his judgments (14:1-20)
 - i. 144,000 perfect in devotion (οὗτοι οἱ ἀκολουθοῦντες τῷ ἄρνῳ) (4)
 - ii. “Judgment has come” (ἦλθεν ἡ ὥρα τῆς κρίσεως αὐτοῦ) (7)
 - iii. Fall of Babylon and its promoters (8-11)
 - iv. Beatitudes for the faithful (12, 13)
 - v. The sickles of wrath as wielded by angels (14-20)
 - e. Seven angels with seven plagues: the end of God’s wrath on those who do not worship God (ἐτελέσθη ὁ θυμὸς τοῦ θεοῦ) (15:1)
 - i. Worship continues (2-4)
 - ii. Full attention is given to the outpouring of wrath (5-8)
 - f. The release of wrath on the unfaithful (16:1-21)
 - i. Bowl #1— “painful sores”
 - ii. Bowl #2— “the sea died”
 - iii. Bowl #3—fresh water turned to blood
 - iv. Bowl #4—scorching sun

- v. Bowl #5—judgment of the Beast
 - vi. Bowl #6—a dry Euphrates prepared for Armageddon (Ἀρμαγεδών) (16)
 - vii. Bowl #7—a plague of hail
- X. Details of the Fall of Babylon
 - a. The drunken woman dressed in purple = Babylon (μυστήριον, Βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη, ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς) (17:5)
 - b. The Beast = Rome (?), world systems in rebellion toward God’s reign, wisdom is needed (ὥδε ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἔχων σοφίαν) (9) (17:9-17)
 - c. Songs of the fall (18:1-24)
- XI. The Final Battle and the Final Judgment (19:1-20:15)
 - a. A salvation song and invitation to the Lamb’s supper (19:1-10)
 - b. Another description of the victorious Lamb (19:11-16)
 - c. A summary of the final battle (19:17-21)
 - d. An explanation of evil and its final destiny (20:1-10)
 - e. The final judgment (20:11-15)
- XII. The End: Servants of God and the Lamb (21:1-22:7)
 - a. All things are new (ἰδοὺ καινὰ ποιῶ πάντα) (21:5)
 - b. Perfection is, again, defined in numbers and precious stones (21:9-21)
 - c. Judgment for the righteous is defined in terms of the light of the Lamb (οἱ γεγραμμένοι ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἁρνίου) (27) (21:22-27)
 - d. The perfect ending: bliss for servants of the Lamb (οἱ δοῦλοι αὐτοῦ λατρεύσουσιν αὐτῷ) (22:3)
- XIII. Epilogue (22:8-21)
 - a. John’s final word: “Worship God!” (τῷ θεῷ προσκύνησον) (9)
 - b. Jesus’ final word: “I am coming soon” (ναί, ἔρχομαι ταχύ) (20)
 - c. The final “Amen”

APPENDIX B

APOCALYPTIC WRITINGS

Even though the Bible contains only two complete apocalypses (Daniel and Revelation), many Jewish and Christian works of this genre were produced. Dates are approximate.

Jewish Apocalypses

1. The “Book of the Watchers” (*1 En. 1-36*)—3rd century BC
2. The “Book of the Heavenly Luminaries” (*1 En. 73-82*)—3rd century BC
3. The “Animal Apocalypse” (*1 En. 85-90*)—2nd century BC
4. The “Apocalypse of Weeks” (*1 En. 93:1-10; 91:11-17*)—2nd century BC
5. *Jubilees 23*—2nd century BC
6. The *Testament of Levi* 2-5—2nd century BC
7. The *Testament of Abraham*—1st century BC-2nd century AD
8. The *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*—1st century BC-1st century AD
9. The “Similitudes of Enoch” (*1 En. 37-71*)—1st century AD
10. *2 Enoch*—1st century AD
11. *4 Ezra*—1st century AD
12. *2 Baruch*—1st century AD
13. The *Apocalypse of Abraham*—1st-2nd century AD
14. *3 Baruch*—1st-2nd century AD

Christian Apocalypses (Gnostic Christian works are not included in this list)

1. The *Shepherd of Hermas*—1st or 2nd century
2. The *Book of Elchasai*—2nd century
3. The *Ascension of Isaiah* 6-11—1st or 2nd century
4. The *Apocalypse of Peter*—2nd century
5. *5 Ezra* 2:42-48
6. *Jacob’s Ladder*—2nd century?
7. The *Testament of the Lord* 1:1-14—3rd century?
8. The *Question of Bartholomew*—3rd century?
9. The *Apocalypse of Sedrach*—2nd-4th century?
10. The *Apocalypse of Paul*—4th century?
11. The *Testament of Isaac* 2-3a—1st-5th century?
12. The *Testament of Isaac* 5-6—1st-5th century?
13. The *Testament of Jacob* 1-3a—2nd-5th century?
14. The *Testament of Jacob* 2-5—2nd-5th century?
15. The *Story of Zosimus*—3-5th century?
16. The *Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian*—2nd-9th century?
17. The *Book of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ by Bartholomew the Apostle* 8b-14a—3rd-6th century?
18. The *Book of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ by Bartholomew the Apostle* 17b-19b—3rd-6th century?
19. The *Apocalypse of the Virgin Mary*—4th-9th century?

20. The *Apocalypse of Esdras*—5th-9th century?
21. The *Apocalypse of the Holy Mother of God Concerning the Punishments*—4th-11 century?

APPENDIX C

LETTER TO HUDSON RIVER PRESBYTERY PASTORS

The First Presbyterian Church in Denton
New Hampton, New York 10958
845-374-6886

July 10, 2007

Dear Colleague in Ministry,

The Lord be with you. Thank you for your ministry in the Hudson River Presbytery. I just started my fifth year in the HRP on March 1. The reason I am writing you is because I need your help. I am in the final stages of earning my Doctor of Ministry degree at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. My concentration is in Preaching the Literary Forms of the Bible. One of those literary forms is the apocalyptic form found in late Hebrew texts and, of course, the Book of Revelation.

My final project includes getting a sense of PC (USA) ministers' use of the texts of Revelation. I thought my fellow HRP ministers would be the best ones with whom to make this inquiry. Enclosed you will find a short survey/questionnaire about your use of the text. I've tried to make the survey brief. I do not want to burden you with more work but I hope you will take 15 minutes to answer the survey.

The final product of my project will be the construction of a Revelation study guide. I don't pretend to know it all. But I hope the study guide will serve pastors and lay folk in their pursuit of knowledge of the Scriptures. Perhaps Fred Craddock says it best,

It is important to remember that the church was born in the synagogue, a "house of instruction," and everywhere the church has gone it has formed an academy, a critical community in the service of the faith. This fact of the church's life is sometimes forgotten because of the tension that usually exists between the church at worship and prayer and the church at study. (*Preaching*, 1985, p. 135)

I hope the study guide will be an intelligent, exegetically sound document reflecting solid Reformed theology. Your input as a "critical community in the service of the faith" will help me accomplish this goal. Thanks in advance for your help.

In Christ,
Peter T. Johnson, Pastor
Denton Presbyterian Church
P.O. Box 72
New Hampton, New York 10958

APPENDIX D

A SURVEY OF MINISTERS IN THE HUDSON RIVER PRESBYTERY

1. How many times a year do you preach from the Book of Revelation?
 - a. Occasionally
 - b. Depends on the Lectionary
 - c. Never
 - d. Other:

2. If you could, would you preach Revelation as a series in your church?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Why or why not?

3. Would you teach Revelation in a Bible study?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Why or why not?

4. How well did Seminary/Divinity School prepare you for preaching Revelation and other apocalyptic literature?
 - a. Very well
 - b. Somewhat
 - c. Hardly at all
 - d. We did not have a course in apocalyptic literature

5. Revelation is a challenge because (circle all that apply)
 - a. There is too much bad theology going around on TV and in books
 - b. The culture has distorted the message
 - c. The church has distorted the message
 - d. Apocalyptic literature is unique compared to other literary forms in Scripture

(Over)

(Survey, continued)

6. Do you get many questions about apocalyptic themes from congregants?
 - a. All the time
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Rarely
 - d. Almost never

7. If you do preach from Revelation, what commentary and/or study guide is most helpful?

8. What chapter or theme in Revelation interests you the most? Why?

9. Is the Book of Revelation relevant to the present situation within post-modern America?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Why or why not?

10. My church would be interested in a Revelation study guide
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Maybe. I would have to preview it first.

(Please feel free to add more comments on a separate sheet of paper. Thank you for your time.)

APPENDIX E

HRP PASTOR SURVEY RESULTS

	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6
1	b, c	a	a	c	a, b, c, d	b
2	b	a	a	c	a, d	b
3	b	a	a	c	a, b, c	b
4	a	a	a	a	a, b, d	c
5	d ("rarely")	a	a	b	a, b, c, d	d
6	b	perhaps"	a	b	a, b, c, d	c
7	b	maybe"	b	d	d	b
8	b	perhaps"	a	b	a, b, c, d	c
9	a	a	a	b	a, b, c	b
10	a	a	a	b	a, b, c, d	b
11	a	a	a	a	a, b	d
12	a, b	a	a	b	a, b, c, d	b
13	a ("rarely")	a	a	c	d	c
14	b	a	a	b	a, c, d	b
15	a	a	a	a	a, c, d	b
16	a, b	one series	a	b, d	a, d	c
17	b	a	a	c	a, d	b
18	a, b	a	a	not sure	a, d--Christian radio = aggh	b
19	c	b, incomprehensible and dull	a--with hired help from a professor	c	a, d	c
20	a	a	a	b	a, d	b
21	rarely"	b	b	b	a, d	c
22	a	a	a	a	a, c, d	b
23	d	a	a	b	a, d	c
24	a	a	a	a	d	c
25	a	a	a	d	a, b	d
26	a, b	a	a	b	a, d	b
27	a, b, funerals	a	a	b	a, d	b
28	b	a	a	c	a, d	b
29	b	I might"	a	b	a, d	c
30	b	a	a	c	a, b, d	b
31	a	a	a	b	a	d
32	a	a	a	a	a, d	b
33	b	a	a	a	c	d
34	a	a	a	a	a, b, c	c

Quest 7	
1	Peterson
2	Peakes, Beasley-Murray
3	I "surf" many
4	Interpreters, Breaking the Code-Metzger, The Most Revealing Book in the Bible--Eller
5	Daniel Barrington, Walter Wink
6	wide variety"
7	Beale
8	Interpreters, Kittel
9	Interpreters
10	Rev for Dummies, The Rapture Exposed, The Meaning of the Millennium, Breaking the Code, also Palmer, Beasley-Murray
11	Rapture Exposed, the Finger of God
12	Interpreters
13	Interpretation
14	kerygma, New Interp Bible
15	Anchor Com, Mounce, Guthrie
16	blank
17	Interpretation, Brueggemann, Boesak
18	Ray Brown, Wink
19	blank
20	Harper, Caird, Metzger
21	Interpretation
22	Hendrickson, Morris
23	Osborne, Mounce
24	Seasons of the Spirit
25	blank
26	Lec Com, Interpretation
27	Barclay, Interpretation
28	Hailey's, Interpreters, Barclay
29	Interpretation (Boring)
30	New Interpreters Bible
31	Voif--Exclusion and Embrace; Gilles--The Secret Book of Revelation
32	Anchor Bible
33	Reversed Thunder
34	Interpreters, Barclay, Stringfellow, Wilmore

APPENDIX F

LETTER TO TEN PASTORS



DENTON PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Celebrating 175 Years

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Dear Colleague in Ministry,

The Lord be with you. I am finishing my Doctor of Ministry project and would appreciate your help as I conclude my studies. My concentration is “Preaching the Literary Forms of the Bible.” My project is about genre sensitivity in apocalyptic literature; especially as it applies to the Lamb depicted in Revelation 5.

The first part of this project included a questionnaire/survey I sent out to seventy-two pastors in the HRP about their use of Revelation in ministry. Thirty-four answered and filled out the questionnaire. Because of their response, the final product of my project is a study guide. I don’t pretend to know it all. But I hope the study guide will serve pastors and lay folk in their pursuit of knowledge of the Scriptures. Fred Craddock says it well,

“It is important to remember that the church was born in the synagogue, a ‘house of instruction,’ and everywhere the church has gone it has formed an academy, a critical community in the service of the faith. The fact of the church’s life is sometimes forgotten because of the tension that usually exists between the church at worship and prayer and the church at study” (*Preaching*, 1985, p. 135).

It is in this spirit that I am asking for your help. Attached to this introductory letter is a study guide based on my D.Min. studies. I would appreciate your reading it over and critiquing it as you see fit. I include a few questions for you to answer with a SASE for return to me. You can help me evaluate my work as I conclude this project. I thank you in advance for your time and effort.

In Christ,

Peter T. Johnson

APPENDIX G

A STUDY GUIDE FOR THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Introduction

The Book of Revelation is weird and it frightens people. The gruesome images found in the last book of the Bible can be scary if we do not understand the literary genre we call apocalyptic. Revelation is apocalyptic literature. Since this is so, it should be treated within the parameters of the genre. Revelation by its very nature contains images that cause us to scratch our heads in wonderment. Unfortunately, such literature also causes people to stop reading the book because of these images. It gets very confusing.

There are some things we can learn about apocalyptic literature that will help us read Revelation with joy and wonder. The first thing we need to know is that Revelation is filled with images, metaphors, symbols, and other literary devices. These literary devices are not to be taken literally. Rather, they have literary functions.

For example, John the Baptist calls Jesus “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). No one reading that text takes John literally. We understand that John is speaking with a metaphor. Jesus will be killed. His death is a sacrificial one like the lambs that are killed during the Jewish Passover. When John speaks this way, our minds are drawn to Old Testament images of sacrifice. If Jesus is God’s “lamb,” then Jesus has a special significance in the economy of God.

In Revelation 5, we will find another Lamb. This Lamb takes a scroll from God and unseals its seven seals. What this means for you and me will be discussed in detail below. For now, we know that the Lamb has an important role in the plan of God. Calling Jesus the Lamb of God helps us single out Jesus as a central character in that plan. So, learning the literary characteristics of Revelation is important because it will help us understand the last book of the Bible.

Characteristics of Apocalyptic Literature

We want to become genre sensitive to the literary characteristics of apocalyptic literature like Revelation. Here is a list of items that are common to apocalyptic literature.¹

1. Apocalyptic is from the Greek word *apokalypsis* which means “unveiling” or “revelation”
2. Revelatory literature that unveils cosmic secrets to a human recipient
3. Information about events of the final days of the world: judgment and rewards
4. Involves an angel or mediator who conducts the journey for the human participant
5. Involves a famous figure who is well-known to the recipients e.g., John or, in the Old Testament, Daniel
6. Written in response to crises: political, social, theological, existential, etc.

¹ Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation* (Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys, 2001).

7. Written to bring comfort and hope to the designated recipients
8. Provides an alternative way of looking at the world
9. Written as protest literature against the powers-that-be
10. Filled with irony, sometimes dark and humorous, that reveals the dangerous pride of humankind caught up in the deceit of Evil

Our modern world is fond of popularized apocalyptic language. The recent snowstorms in the Northeast have been referred to as the Snowpocalypse. The unrelenting cold, the amount of snow, and the frequency with which it falls add credence to such a claim.

Hollywood loves apocalyptic genre. Movies like *Inception* have a certain otherworldly feel about them. Whether it's the Harry Potter stories or *The Lord of the Rings*, fantastic creatures and the end of the world, as it is known, plays a part in the story. The better stories have a hero who saves the day. Does Revelation have such a hero?

Four Tools for Studying Revelation

Revelation is less a puzzle to be solved than a piece of art to be discovered and enjoyed. There are four tools that will help us approach Revelation with some confidence. They require a healthy, sanctified imagination. The four tools we will use increase a genre-sensitive approach to Revelation. The four tools help us see Revelation as a form of literature that invites us into the Gospel story. It comes as us "sideways." That is, like Jesus' parables, we are given space to think, pray, and read our way to understanding the great redemptive story of God. Here are the four tools we will endeavor to apply to the study of Revelation

- *First tool—embrace the central metaphor.* Jesus Christ is revealed to be the Lamb of God in Revelation 5. A metaphorical understanding of Jesus as the Lamb of God will ground the reader in the Gospel.
- *Second tool—enter the historical context.* The historical context involves trying to read the text as if we were in one of the seven churches John is writing to in Asia Minor. We cannot know everything they knew. But, we may discover some common ground.
- *Third tool—explore Old Testament references.* The Old Testament fuels John's imagination. In fact, the Old Testament is John's "data base" for his own imagination. If John did not love the Old Testament, we would not have the pleasure of reading Revelation.
- *Fourth tool—engage Revelation's eschatological key—the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.*

Eschatology is the study of last things. This study guide begins with the presupposition that Jesus' work on the cross and his subsequent resurrection is the beginning of the End. That is, eschatology revolves around a theology of the cross. Jesus' work on the cross and his resurrection from the dead changes everything!

Use of the four tools fosters genre sensitivity. These four tools guide the genre sensitive reader/listener. These four tools help encourage sanctified imaginations in the reading and study of Revelation.

Five Texts for Study in Revelation

This study guide will look at five passages from the Book of Revelation: Revelation 1:1-6, Revelation 4:1-11, Revelation 5:1-14, Revelation 13:1-18, and Revelation 22:1-21. Each section will have an introduction followed by the text itself as it appears in the New Revised Standard Version. Then there will be a series of questions for each section. The guide will ask the reader to use the four tools for to help interpret each text. The questions will concentrate on bringing understanding and genre sensitivity to the text as it reveals Jesus Christ and the Gospel. It is my hope that his study guide will be found useful and fun for those who wish to dive deeper into the apocalyptic literature we call Revelation.

Revelation 1: Who's in Charge?

In a world torn by violence, religious intolerance and extremism, and political intrigue, we ask, "Where is God?" From the looks of things, God is not present. John's original audience, the seven churches of Asia Minor, may have been wondering the same thing. Where is his promised return? Why all the suffering, especially when it comes to being a Christian?

John is an exile on the island called Patmos. Rome may not be the beneficent power she pretends to be. Rome extends her power and people suffer. How should God's people react? Is there something they can do? What is God doing? What follows sounds like a call, a call to worship!

Revelation 1:1-6

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,² who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.³ Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.

⁴ John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood,⁶ and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Questions for Consideration

1. What are the four tools we use for uncovering the Gospel message in this passage?
2. What metaphor(s) is John using to describe Jesus?

3. Where is an Old Testament reference and/or inference?

4. What could the believers of 1st century Asia Minor have in common with 21st century believers of the USA?

5. How would you sum up this passage in one sentence?

Revelation 4: Anticipation and An Avalanche of Praise

Revelation is an apocalyptic piece of literature that is appropriately read during a worship service. It is also an epistle to seven local churches in Asia Minor. But John is also a recipient (perhaps the main recipient) of this revelation. We begin to see John's very emotional participation in the drama about to unfold in Revelation 4.

This chapter begins with John being invited into Heaven so that he might observe and participate in the Heavenly drama about to unfold. Revelation 4 is like an avalanche of praise: it slowly but surely gathers momentum toward a goal to be revealed in Revelation 5. See if you can feel what John feels. Remember, reading and listening to apocalyptic literature requires imagination inspired by God's Holy Spirit. God is always ready to inspire us through God's Word.

Revelation 4:1-11

After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."

² At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne!

³ And the one seated there looks like jasper and carnelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald.

⁴ Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads.

⁵ Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God;

⁶ and in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal. Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind:

⁷ the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle.

⁸ And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing, "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come."

⁹ And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever,

¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing,

¹¹ "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

Questions for Consideration

1. What element of apocalyptic literature appears in 4:1?
2. Use the four tools to help your understanding of this awesome scene.
3. What is going on in Heaven? How is it pictured?
4. Is there a tension building into some sort of climactic event?
5. How is this drama in Revelation 4 like your experience in worship, if at all?

Revelation 5: The Irony of Gospel Redemption

If Revelation 4 anticipates a stupendous event with the avalanche of praise, Revelation 5 surprises us with that revelation. We see a weeping prophet in John of Patmos. We see unworried angels praising God and giving John some consolation. We see the one "who sits upon the throne." Finally, we see a Lamb.

John's use of the Greek is significant. The word used for "lamb" in the Gospel of John is *amnos*. Jesus is the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Here in Revelation 5, the writer uses a different word—*arnion*, a word that highlights the diminutive stature of this Lamb, at least from its outward appearance. We might translate this word as "lamby" or "lambkins." I can't help but think of an early TV character I know as Lambchops. The Lamb is the key metaphor. What significance might such an image have for Christians? For unbelievers?

Revelation 5:1-14

Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals;

² and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"

³ And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it.

⁴ And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.

⁵ Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

⁶ Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

⁷ He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne.

⁸ When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

⁹ They sing a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation;

¹⁰ you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth."

¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands,

¹² singing with full voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

¹³ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"

¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the elders fell down and worshiped.

Questions for Consideration

1. Why does John weep? (v. 4)
2. What might the scroll be?
3. Why is the Lamb worthy to open the scroll?
4. How might this scene reflect the cross, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus?
5. What comfort do we gain?

Revelation 13: Looking Evil in the Eye

What better way to disarm evil than to give it a caricatured identity? The image used by the author in Revelation 13 may give the reader/listeners of Revelation some needed comic relief. However, evil is not trivialized by doing so. Rather, evil is given serious consideration. Through this somewhat comedic portrayal, evil is exposed.

The image provided helps John's readers take an honest look at themselves, the world, and those who might be persecuting them. Hereby, they are free to examine the phenomenon of evil because they understand the genre of apocalyptic literature.

Genre-sensitive readers of Revelation are tied with theological thread to the Lamb who was slaughtered but stands. The reader/listener of Revelation understands that Jesus holds the keys to life and death. The reader/listener of Revelation comprehends the mystery of forgiveness via the Lamb. The theological foundation provided by the metaphor of the Lamb is the literary anchor from which God's people explore all other metaphors and images in the Book of Revelation.

Revelation 13:1-18

And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads; and on its horns were ten diadems, and on its heads were blasphemous names.

² And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And the dragon gave it his power and his throne and great authority.

³ One of its heads seemed to have received a death-blow, but its mortal wound had been healed. In amazement the whole earth followed the beast.

⁴ They worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"

⁵ The beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months.

⁶ It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven.

⁷ Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. It was given authority over every tribe and people and language and nation,

⁸ and all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slaughtered.

⁹ Let anyone who has an ear listen:

¹⁰ If you are to be taken captive, into captivity you go; if you kill with the sword, with the sword you must be killed. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

¹¹ Then I saw another beast that rose out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon.

¹² It exercises all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and it makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound had been healed.

¹³ It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of all;

¹⁴ and by the signs that it is allowed to perform on behalf of the beast, it deceives the inhabitants of earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that had been wounded by the sword and yet lived;

¹⁵ and it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image of the beast could even speak and cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

¹⁶ Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead,

¹⁷ so that no one can buy or sell who does not have the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name.

¹⁸ This calls for wisdom: let anyone with understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person. Its number is six hundred sixty-six.

Questions for Consideration

1. What is the sincerest form of flattery?
2. What is being imitated in Rev. 13?
3. Who is being imitated in Rev. 13?
4. How might the four tools be employed?
5. What role does the devil/evil play in the drama of salvation?

Revelation 22: The End

The last chapter of Revelation is divided into two parts. Part one gives a picture (vision) of what the universe will be like after the judgment (vs. 1-6). Notice the throne is now called “the throne of God and the Lamb” (v. 1). It is an idyllic scene where there is complete harmony, not only between God and human kind, but also between God and the nations (vs. 2, 3).

The second part gives us more words from a resurrected, ascended Christ (vs. 7-21). He instructs John while encouraging him to “hang in there” (v. 12). Sounding very apocalyptic, the Lamb speaks boldly about rewards, patience, sin, and faithfulness.

Knowing who this Lamb is gives genre-sensitive interpreters a leg up on those who would distort the final words written in the Bible (v. 19). As should be expected by now, the final word is a word of grace— “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people” (v. 21).

Revelation 22:1-21

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb

² through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

³ Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him;

⁴ they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

⁵ And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

⁶ And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true, for the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."

⁷ "See, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

⁸ I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me;

⁹ but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

¹⁰ And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.

¹¹ Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy."

¹² "See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work.

¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

¹⁴ Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates.

¹⁵ Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

¹⁶ "It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

¹⁷ The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let everyone who hears say, "Come." And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

¹⁸ I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book;

¹⁹ if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

²⁰ The one who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

²¹ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

Questions for Consideration

1. How do verses 1-5 envision the future?
2. What metaphors, images, or symbols resonate with you the most?

3. How is the metaphor of the Lamb influencing your interpretation of this final chapter?
4. Do verses 14, 15 give you pause? How should they be interpreted?
5. How might the four tools be applied?

Conclusion

There is much to be discovered in the last book of the Bible. It is a Christ-centered, Gospel-centered piece of apocalyptic literature. This study guide is written with the hope that pastors and their congregations will study Revelation with less trepidation and more joy. The four tools suggested for in-depth study can be used by anyone who is curious about scripture. May God bless you as you explore Revelation, the last volume of the sixty-six books we call the Bible.

APPENDIX H

REVELATION STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. Is the text of the guide readable and understandable?
2. Is the concept of the “four tools” articulated well? If not, why not?
3. What can be added or subtracted from the guide in terms of the instructions?
4. What is the main point or big idea of the study guide? Is it communicated well?
5. Will the lay people in your church find the guide to be user-friendly? Why or why not?
6. Would you use this guide in your church for Bible study?
7. What in the guide was most helpful to you as a pastor? Least helpful?
8. Would you recommend the study guide to others?

APPENDIX I

REVELATION STUDY GUIDE CRITIQUE

Q	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6
1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, for the most part. You may want to explain “literary genre” better.
2	Yes	Yes	Yes. But it does presuppose some basic biblical literacy and literary knowledge. Also, use of additional sources could be encouraged in understanding historical context.	Second tool, especially for lay leaders, how do we discover the historical context? Resources? Fourth tool—Too deep for others, may minimize the depth of a theology of the cross.	Yes. But more explanation about how OT can be helpful and more context for the 7 churches addressed by John.	Need better explanation of “historical context.”
3	Add a few more pondering questions, remove a few one-word answers	[No answer given]	Depends on the group. Explain literary genre and why it matters, suggest more resources.	Introduction helped focus on key issues in the scripture.	See #2.	No suggestions .

4	Genre sensitivity	Revelation is based on the Gospels and image of Christ as a sacrificial lamb.	Jesus is Lamb of God who died, was raised, and is central to understanding.	“If we study Revelation as apocalyptic literature as opposed to reading it literally, we can begin to understand Revelation.” Less doom and gloom but more hopeful given the presence of Christ and the Gospel.	Folks need not be afraid of the text but understand its richness as part of the Gospel.	To encourage reading and use of Revelation. A good job communicating it.
5	Yes, concise, accessible, interesting, something they wonder about.	Yes. It is fairly accessible, rarely uses academic terms or phrasing.	Not sure, instructions are clear, questions are open-ended enough. Basic OT knowledge is needed.	It is user-friendly. Wording is high school level and understandable for most church members.	Most would though some will want more [historical] context.	People may still be intimidated and will need support of study leader.
6	Yes	Yes	See # 5	Yes	Yes	Yes, may help us to avoid the study of Revelation.
7	I liked that it was all there (including the scripture texts).	The 4 tools are useful.	Central metaphor puts book into focus regarding gospel message. Too short for an in-depth study	It will help with sermon prep. Least helpful? —you only looked at 5 of the 22 chapters. Question 4 of chapter 4 is not open-ended but should be.	Most helpful how short explanations go with each text to help the reader move along from each Scripture.	The questions are helpful. [No comment on least helpful]
8	Yes	Yes.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

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VITA

Peter Thomas Johnson was born on May 15, 1951, in Somerville, N.J. Peter attended The King's College, Briar Cliff Manor, N.Y. before transferring to Oral Roberts University where he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Literature in 1980. He then attended Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary where he graduated with a Master of Arts in Theological Studies (New Testament) in 1983. Ordained at Peabody Baptist Church in July 1986, Peter began his first parish ministry at Talmadge Hill Community Church, Darien, CT until 1995. In 1997, he became a member of the pastoral staff at the Noroton Presbyterian Church, Darien, CT until 2003. After completing a Master of Divinity at Yale Divinity School in 2002, Peter became Pastor at The First Presbyterian Church in Denton, New Hampton, NY in March 2003 until the present. He expects to graduate with the Doctor of Ministry degree in May 2018, after beginning the program in 2005. Peter is married to Joanne and together they have two sons, one daughter, and four grandchildren.